

(W)RAPS OF CONSCIOUSNESS: ARTICULATING WOMEN'S RIGHTS THROUGH HIP
HOP IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION

BY

ANGELA SELENA WILLIAMS

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Cameron McCarthy, Chair
Associate Professor Ruth Nicole Brown
Professor Pradeep Dhillon
Professor William Trent

ABSTRACT

Although hip hop culture has widely been acknowledged as a global cultural movement, little attention has been given to women's participation in various parts of the world and how this participation interacts with and impacts the lives of other women. In this dissertation, I use the lenses of postcolonial aesthetics (McCarthy and Dimitriadi, 2000; Dhillon, 2014), U.S. third world feminist studies (Sandoval, 1991; Spivak, 1985; Mansour, 2016) and hip hop feminist studies (Morgan, 1999; Pough, 2004; Brown, 2013; Durham, 2013) to examine the diverse lived experiences of girls and women in the Middle East and North Africa region through the work of seven female rappers: Shadia Mansour (Palestine), Malikah (Lebanon), Soutlana (Morocco), Soska (Egypt), Myam Mahmoud (Egypt), Amani (Yemen), and Justina (Iran). Representations of girlhood and womanhood are received and interpreted by women from these countries residing in a Midwestern university town in the U.S. through interviews and discussions as the women reflect on what the messages from the artists mean in their own lives. Through discourse ethnography (Morley, 1999; Baéz, 2007; Durham, 2013), I analyze popular culture texts, including online songs, videos, lyrics, commentary and media coverage, created by and dedicated to MENA women rappers. These texts combined with women's real life experiences make more accessible women's voices from the region. Through their articulations of agency and liberation, the rappers display differential oppositional consciousnesses (Sandoval, 1991) in their personal and professional networks to imagine a better future for women in their societies. I argue that hip hop feminism as a theory and praxis can be applied to the MENA region to develop more varied, emancipatory epistemologies and perspectives on girlhood and womanhood.

To My Nieces:
Kaela, Kasinda, Alana, Kaleah, Kalarah, Kandra, Kayzel-Leé

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PREFACE

For the past three years, whenever I told anyone that I was planning my dissertation to be on women rappers in the Middle East and North Africa¹, the response has always been the same: surprise, awe, intrigue. “*Are there* women who rap?” was often the first question the person would ask. I believe this disbelief was twofold: first, people – often those from the region – were surprised that women had taken up this presumably foreign art form – hip hop – and that they had not heard of them. Second, and most often, people were surprised by the fact that *women* were doing it. Both responses expose presumptions about art and its dissemination, self-expression, and women as cultural actors in the MENA region. The responses are indicative of the prevailing misunderstanding and misrepresentation of this diverse region and women’s lives.

My studies of the MENA region began through Arabic language study as an undergraduate linguistics student. In my senior year, I was awarded a federally-funded scholarship to study Arabic in Egypt for a year. Completely excited, in the months before I left, I met with and talked to anyone I could about what it would be like to live in Egypt. One such instance was a phone conversation with a man who had been in Egypt a couple decades prior with a development organization. Towards the end of the conversation, he said, “Now, I can tell by your voice that you sound like you’re African American. Is that right?” This was the first time in my life someone had ever tried to racially identify me over the phone and I was taken aback. When I affirmed this – that yes, I am biracial, my father African American, my mother white – he began to caution me about the public mistreatment of Sudanese refugees in Egypt. He implied that those who may be identifiably of African descent might be mistaken as Sudanese

¹ Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, meaning the area spanning from Morocco in the west to Iran in the east and from Turkey in the north to Yemen in the south. I recognize that this term is problematic and denotes a Eurocentric viewpoint. It remains widely used in academic, business and political writing, however.

and therefore harassed in public until local Egyptians realize that we are Americans – the “right” kind of blacks. I had spoken with a Black male student who had studied in Egypt the year prior and he had not mentioned this to me at all, so I was surprised. However, the comment proved valid. Three Black women living in my dorm in Cairo that year told me that they had been harassed in the streets while walking several times – one was even spat at from a bus window. While I was welcomed overwhelmingly and felt a sense of belonging, one of the women in the group considered ending her studies early because of the harsh treatment. The elite American University in Cairo where I studied everyday offered even more complexity. Egyptian students there sometimes spoke in English to one another and dressed in the latest European and American brands and styles. I attended a music event at the campus one evening where several students performed a hip hop concert. The complex interactions of perceived gender, race, nationality, and social class was a part of each day. In my experiences, blackness could be embraced or treated as a disgrace.

Over nearly the past 15 years, both as a student and professional working within Middle East studies, the number of U.S. students of color studying the region that I’ve met can be counted on one hand. I find this disturbing and often quite isolating. Much of the academic work written about the region comes from authors writing out of a privileged perspective, both within his or her home country and abroad. When you don’t have to worry about being spat at, when you feel secure because of the historical dominance in a region that your group has enjoyed, you are going to have a certain perspective. My experience as a person of color and person of the American “other” has allowed me to observe the construction of a particular racialized American identity abroad, as well as to observe how we in the U.S. continue to perceive and distance what is constructed as the “other” from ourselves.

What most interests me about MENA women who rap are the artists' *self-representations* of their own plights and the plights of other women, as well as the artists' choice and use of hip hop as the code in which to carry their messages through online platforms which most often result in little or no economic gain to them. At a time when women's agency in leadership, women's rights and protection against harassment in the workplace, and women's choices over their health right here in the U.S. are being threatened and not fully realized, the work to dispel these misrepresentations has become even more important to me personally. The increase in violence done to black, brown and marginalized bodies in the U.S. has been traumatic for me, family members and others to witness in recent years. I hope that this study of hip hop culture among MENA rappers calls to remembrance the continued postcolonial struggle many still face in the U.S.

In the Midwestern college town where I live, practicing Muslim women host dance parties, fashion shows, pursue PhDs, organize summer programs for their children and others in the community. Yet often, if they are identifiably Muslim, they are marked as different or odd by peers. Recently I was talking to a woman who has three children and leads a Muslim homeschool cooperative. "How's your paper going?" she asked me. "Let me know when you've finished it. I'd love to read it. The kids could also read it and discuss." She explained that the curriculum included critical reading and writing assignments on current events essays. It is this attitude of *engagement with* (the rest of the world) and not *separation from* among Muslim women that I want to acknowledge and hope to draw out in this work.

Angela S. Williams, August 2017

Champaign, IL

INTRODUCTION: THE MUSICAL INTIFADA

We are the generation that goes to the battlefield with weapons of creation. We communicate, debate and protest through art. This is why I refer to our activities as a “musical *intifada* [uprising, shaking off of oppression]”. Our weapons will never run out of ammunition because they are weapons of the soul (Anderson 2011: 62).

This quote is attributed to the UK-born rapper of Palestinian descent, Shadia Mansour, in an interview she gave while in New York performing at a concert. Known as the “First Lady of Arab Hip Hop”, Mansour’s transnational background and travels, her veneration of cultural heritage-associated symbolism and dress, and her connection to artists and activists who identify with postcolonial struggle, exemplify the oppositional awareness characteristic of other women who rap within the Middle East and North Africa region. Mansour’s message of self-determination for the Palestinian people parallels that of other MENA women rappers, who write and rhyme to effect the self-determination of women in the region – to defend themselves against street harassment, to protect themselves from forced marriages or unwanted relationships with men, to carve out the lives and futures they want for themselves. These artists use their voices to speak back to the void of representative work on their lives. In this current time – of travel ban, wall-building political speech, of a pass given to white supremacist demonstrations in public spaces, of sexual harassment and assault cases daily coming to the public eye – the creative work of *representation* becomes akin to that of *humanization* and, therefore, survival. In education, it’s crucial to see how misrepresentation and underrepresentation leads to alienation, disassociation and creation of an “other” who will become the enemy at the convenient time. MENA women rappers as cultural actors take the work of representation and knowledge production into their own hands.

Within popular culture, media, political discourse and too often academia, the bodies and lives of women from the predominantly Muslim MENA region exist in a paradox of invisibility and hypervisibility². For the generation that came of age in the twenty-first century, Disney's Princess Jasmine from *Aladdin* or the television show *I Dream of Jeannie* were likely the only representations known. Such representations in popular culture were effective in doing what colonial travelogues of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had done: they exoticized women and marked their lives as being from another time and place (Kahf, 1999).. At the same time, the lives and bodies of women from this region have been highly politicized, such to the extent that supports U.S. military intervention in the region, as was the case in Afghanistan (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Sabile and Kumar, 2005). The gross misrepresentations of women's lives have tainted public opinion and driven foreign policy; policy makers and policy intellectuals have failed to include voices of women themselves outside of a propaganda platform. Such representations have depicted women as overall lacking individual and collective agency, or exercising power and choices over their own lives.

In this dissertation, I aim to examine the diverse lived experiences of girls and women in the Middle East and North Africa region, particularly Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Palestine, Morocco, and Yemen, through the artistic work they create. I particularly look at women's participation in hip hop culture, which has been acknowledged as a global movement and practice (Terkourafi, 2010) – and specifically women who are rapping³ – for how women are carving out various

² The paradox of invisibility and hypervisibility is not a new phenomenon, but has been discussed in terms of black women's experiences in the U.S. by Michelle Wallace in her book *Invisibility Blues* (1990).

³ Scholars and artists acknowledge four elements of hip hop culture: rapping, deejaying, breakdancing, and graffiti (Chang 2005). Rapping is also referred to as “emceeing” or “MCing”, an abbreviation for “master of ceremonies”, and refers to the act of speaking over a beat. This beat traditionally comes from the deejay (or DJ) who operates the turntables. Today, however,

identifications and how these identifications are brought forth in mainstream and independent media coverage of the artists and in social media. I also look at the extent to which women from the region relate to the messages in the music. Through discourse ethnography, a double agency is observed – one in which the artist expresses her grievances over social problems concerning women, and one in which the audience member herself reflects on the lyrics and express how they relate to her life. The reflections voiced by the audience members show their agency and mechanisms for negotiating or pushing against the gendered norms.

The seven MENA women rappers – Shadia Mansour (Palestine), Malukah (Lebanon), Soutlana (Morocco), Soska (Egypt), Myam Mahmoud (Egypt), Amani (Yemen), and Justina (Iran) – use their music and personal styles to give voice to the desire for women’s liberation from legal and social codes that control more than protect their lives. These codes concern women’s dress and appearance, sexual harassment and domestic abuse, and women’s perceived socialization with men. Through their lyrics and online representations, the artists also depict women’s agency in choosing how to dress, with whom to socialize and in life choices as in careers and professions. Discussions with eight women audience members from these countries and affiliated with U.S. universities have indicated that issues raised by the artists are relevant to their lives. The audience members related to dealing with street sexual harassment, social pressures and expectations regarding life choices, and preserving cultural heritage. Overall, this project has joined the popular culture texts pertaining to MENA women in hip hop with women’s real life experiences to allow women’s voices from the region to be more accessible.

the beats are often time recorded or technologically manipulated. “Breaking”, “b-boying” or “b-girling” refers to the style of dance performed. Afrika Baambata, a DJ born in 1957 in the South Bronx and founding member of the group Universal Zulu Nation, has also added “knowledge” as a fifth element of hip hop culture (Aubry 2014).

This study is significant theoretically because it broadens a critique of Orientalism – the defining of the region and its people for the benefit of the West and construing that place as unchanging (Said, 1978) – to one that includes a woman-centered perspective. I draw on U.S. third world feminist studies of oppositional consciousness to observe women’s choices to oppose a dominant ideology from within that ideology (Sandoval, 1991) and Spivak’s (1985) notion of “worlding” which again divides the world into a dominant “us” and subordinate “other” (p. 243). While there are definite characteristics significant to the music, such as Arabic language use, musical and lyrical style, the artists’ participation in hip hop culture, the international media coverage the artists have gained and the connections they have established throughout the world tear at the East vs. West dichotomy. Furthermore, the methodological position of discourse ethnography allows for the tracing of social issues and concerns across various texts: music, video, television, online media and life story. Hearing the voices of MENA women artists and their female audiences allows for new theoretical and methodological approaches to producing knowledge about women in the region. Below is a brief outline of the chapters.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter One (MENA Women and the Hip Hop Aesthetic) places the “hip hop aesthetic” – that is, the unique style of musical creativity, performance and being that this kind of music has brought about insomuch that it is recognizable and reproduced globally – within the context of postcolonial aesthetics and third world feminist studies. I first provide a brief review of global hip hop studies and describe hip hop as a U.S. postcolonial art. I then mention how postcolonial art has the potential to create emancipatory and cosmopolitan spaces and impact knowledge production. I introduce third world feminism as a useful lens to observe the artists’ different oppositional consciousness.

Chapter Two (From Double Standards to Double Agency: Discourse Ethnography and Reading Across the Texts of Popular Culture and Lived Experiences), is intentionally devoted to my methodological claims. Since my underlying motivation for this study has been knowledge production – that is, identifying what we *don't know* about MENA women's lives and starting towards a better understanding – it is important for me to be as descript and specific as possible in describing my own methods and context towards producing knowledge. In Chapter Two, I introduce the methodological approach of discourse ethnography, drawing on the work of Baéz (2007) and Durham (2014), and describe my process of data collection both in terms of the artists' production and audience reception of the music produced by MENA women. I give an understanding of discourse and ethnography and explain why discourse ethnography is a useful methodology to observe the artists' and audience members' agency. I also describe how I conducted the social media observations. To contextualize the online texts, I describe the websites that allowed me to identify the artists and listen to their songs. I give brief descriptions of the online media archives that I used to form richer descriptions of the artists' personal backgrounds and work. I also explain my purposeful sampling technique and list the locations where the audience interviews and discussions took place. Through discourse ethnography, the themes of women's liberation and agency can be observed across various contexts, including spoken and written word, print and recorded media, and lived experiences.

In Chapter Three (Rapping for a Change: Profiles of MENA Women Rappers), I provide the artists' biographies and describe the social and historical contexts out of which they have been participating in hip hop culture through writing and rapping. Based on journalist and online commentary as well as the artists' own words through interviews or other online representations, I profile each artist to describe when she began writing and creating her music. I do not intend to

portray MENA women rappers as a homogenous group, but in this chapter I portray the variation in the artists' backgrounds while maintaining their common interest in or identification with hip hop culture. The artists embody local and national sentiments in their self-presentations via traditional styles of dress and language use. At the same time, through their connections to international media groups and international organizations, and by self-identifying as rappers connected to a global community of artists, they dispel an East vs. West duality. The artists' life stories speak back to the orientalist "worlding" that has these women existing in a different time and space than the rest of us (Spivak, 1985, p. 243).

In Chapter Four (*Kash Donya* (I Wish the World): MENA Women Rappers' Representations of Agency and Liberation), I discuss the dominant themes in the artists' music, videos and online representations and the dominant themes of the audience's perceptions. The artists' themes are *women's liberation* from legal and social codes that restrict social behaviors and fail to protect women from abuse, and *women's agency* in her appearance, socialization and professional choices. This chapter reports as well on audience reception to the MENA women rappers' music video texts. The themes perceived by the audience during the interviews are: experiences with sexual harassment, social pressures and expectations, and preservation of cultural heritage. I argue that the MENA women rappers' music and online representations contribute to a new configuration concerning knowledge about women in the MENA region – one that places their voices at the center.

In Chapter Five (MENA Hip Hop Feminism: Towards a Transnational Girlhood/Womanhood Perspective), I will consider the possibility of extending hip-hop feminism (Morgan, 1999; Pough, 2004) – a theoretical and practical intervention in hip-hop studies and education practices that centers on Black and Brown girls' expression and knowledge

production (Brown, 2013). Hip hop feminist studies have focused on the safety and well-being of marginalized Black and Brown bodies, including women and LGBTQ communities. In this chapter, I consider the possibility of extending these studies globally to include non-U.S. based hip-hop producers and consumers, specifically women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. I return to Sandoval's notion of differential oppositional consciousness and propose that the MENA artists operate from national and transnational consciousnesses, including an awareness to other struggles around the world such as the Black Lives Matter movement. I also suggest that studying the artists and other women's perception can help to build understanding and a basis for normalization and de-Orientalization of the region. Thus, the organization of this dissertation lays out my theoretical and methodological frameworks, artists' profiles, and analysis with a final discussion that seeks to connect to future studies and epistemology related to women and popular culture globally and MENA women in popular culture more specifically.

CONCLUSION

The problem of inadequate visual and artistic representation of individuals' lives affects the perception of relatability, likability, and normalcy of those lives. For decades, scholarly work produced from a hegemonic stance has dictated an understanding of the MENA region, leaving no place for the voices of women of the region. The creation of a naïve and exotic Orient normalizes a dominant, controlling Occident. Media and popular culture representations in recent years have done little to acknowledge the voices of the people themselves. In these current times, it is not only a matter of representation, of "having a place at the table" in popular culture, so to speak, but of actual human value – of belonging and the right to exist. The seven artists that I'm looking at demand this and call for changes in gendered norms concerning

expectations for women's behavior – from dress, to socialization and contacts with men – that have become accustomed in their countries.

I position these women's work within a broader context of postcolonial aesthetics, U.S. third world feminist studies and hip hop feminist studies. Just as the artists have made a deliberate choice to be rappers and self-identify as such, I'm deliberately drawing on theory to foreground how creative representational work upsets definitions and meaning (of what is the "Orient" for instance, or even the "MENA region") and power structures. They upset the current knowledge system through their transnational movements, music and online representations. This type of creative work, as will be seen in the following chapter, is characteristic of postcolonial art. Third world U.S. feminist studies and hip hop feminist studies both theorize outside of hegemonic feminist studies, allowing for black/brown/marginalized bodies to achieve recognition of their agency and knowledge of subverting power systems. My methodological claims are also purposed and unique in that I include the online domain as a site for not only dissemination and production but also reception as well. In additional, through purposeful ethnographic interviews, I reveal how the issues of women's agency, liberation and cultural heritage representation are realized in women's lives daily.

Far from being objects of the orientalist's eye, the MENA women rappers are cultural actors. This position as such humanizes them and allows them to draw connections with other liberation movements, such as Black Lives Matter, as will be discussed further in the final chapter. Their voices could be incorporated in to secondary and higher education curriculum to extend the knowledge base about women's lives in the region. In the following chapter I position the artists' music within postcolonial aesthetics. I begin with an online video example

to illustrate the potency of the perception of Muslim women embodying a hip hop aesthetic and the reaction of online audiences.

CHAPTER 1: MENA WOMEN AND THE HIP HOP AESTHETIC

Her name is Afsa. The first sight of her is from the back. Clothed in a black *abaya*, a long black gown, and headscarf – a human form that sticks out among the landscape of other, mainly male, mainly Asian and white students leaving the class. In the background, the teacher, a white male speaking American English, instructs a lab group to stay after class. In this first second, we know nothing else about her, only that *that is a Muslim woman*. But then she turns, faces the camera, and hoists her backpack over one shoulder, a movement that reveals a pop of color – a hot pink wrist watch and magenta fingernails. The wire of a white earbud is hanging out from behind the right side of her scarf. She places a hanging earbud in her left ear and glances at another young woman, dressed similarly, whose headscarf is a tan and brown faux tiger print, and asks her in Persian what she plans to eat. Her pretty face, carefully lined eyes and rose-colored lips, light up at the answer. The two women part ways as they walk into the hallway. The camera zooms in on Afsa's right hand that is holding her phone as she touches the screen with her thumb to start a song. As she turns the corner, the music begins – “Alphabet Aerobics” by the Californian-based hip hop duo Blackalicious – and the camera pans out to show Afsa walking in the middle of the hall, phone in one hand, reading the lyrics from her phone, rapping the final phrases of the song. Her left hand moves through the air to the rhythm of the lyrics and beat. She raps in American English as students pass on both sides, unaffected. The lyrics mnemonically represent each letter of the alphabet. “Universal, unique untouched, unadulterated, the raw uncut.” Toward the end of the song, the words appear on the screen of the video: “It’s not just what we listen to.” And again, “It’s who we are.” The song ends and Afsa glances up. The final sight of her is from behind again, in the middle of the hall, her tall frame

draped in black with a backpack over one shoulder, walking among mainly white students clothed in jeans and shorts.

This video, titled “Afsa’s Theme”, was part of a YouTube ad campaign for the YouTube Music app that launched in November 2016. The five videos were released online on July 18, 2016, which happened to be the first day of the Republican National Convention. According to an online article for Billboard Magazine, each video features “real life Americans from divergent backgrounds who are sometimes discriminated against or marginalized in society” (Gensler, 2016). Another online commentary about the videos described them as “celebrating the diversity and personality of [the YouTube] audience” while exploring individual identity (Green, 2016). Despite these celebratory commentaries, the hostile and distasteful tone of many of the comments posted below the video is striking. With 930,820 views of the official video, there are 8,721 likes and 20,964 dislikes. I’ve listed below some of the top comments that were liked or gained responses. I did not include the YouTube user’s names before their comments and have kept the original spelling and punctuation.

Nobody does this.

As a reply, “Especially not in school.”
the most annoying youtube ad ever and i cant even skip it....

This is such a cringey ad. It feels so forced like where do you ever see that. It's not even that she's Muslim it's that she's just reading off her phone.. what's so special about that..
why is it even an ad

As a reply: no you are actually wrong because I know this for a fact cuz I am
Muslim muslims can listen to only songs with only instruments and people
singing about god. But muslims can't listen to rap or love songs.

where is her male guardian at?

why was she not checked for explosives?

google is run by jews so i dont get why theyd cast a muzzy in their commercial

People must be used to her loudly rapping as she walks around.

As a reply: ... in her home country she would have her head chopped off

Why is youtube trying to push the agenda that wearing hijabs is ok? It's repressive as is most of islam's ideology towards women, nonbelievers, gays, etc.

There were also several parody videos uploaded to YouTube that were created that feature dubbed over chanting of “*Allahu akbar*” (“God is the greatest”) explosive sounds, and images of exploding buildings and of Afsa herself exploding while walking down the hall. Of the top negative comments, the negativity centers around the issues that cell phones are not allowed in school and that a Muslim woman would not be allowed to behave in this manner according to her religious beliefs, which she obviously adhered to due to her style of clothing. These imposed, preconceived ideas are against what is depicted in the video of a young woman enjoying a song and rapping the lyrics. The message and negative audience responses represent a disconnect. The visual of an attractive woman dressed in the Muslim attire and displaying some knowledge and skill of popular culture is in some way threatening to a U.S. audience. This video and the comments exemplify how a message that aims at normalizing a visibly Muslim woman’s experience with hip hop is read, rejected and reinterpreted by the online audience.

Image 1: Afsa’s Theme



Watching “Afsa’s Theme” and reading the online comments give a glimpse at my methodological and theoretical approaches. Here, on the screen, the text – in this case an advertisement video – and the reception reside in the same space. In the video, a representation of globalized hip hop is being used to market a product (the YouTube app) while viewers on the website of the same company disapprove of it in their comments on the page. My methodological approach includes tracing the extent to which the MENA rappers’ biographies and work have spread through online media and observing the receptions the work has received online and through in-person interviews. This is significant since the online realm has become the conduit of production, dissemination and reception. Theoretically, I am situating the MENA women rappers’ work within the work of hip hop feminism and more broadly postcolonial aesthetics. The “hip hop aesthetic” is a part of the postcolonial aesthetic tradition that represents alternative knowledge production and messages of resistance to the dominant structure.

1.1 GLOBAL HIP HOP AESTHETIC

Hip hop as a U.S. cultural product and commodity and global phenomenon has been the subject of a considerable amount of cross-disciplinary scholarly and journalistic work, in disciplines such as cultural studies, media studies, linguistics, and anthropology (Rose 1994 and 2013; Chang 2005). Scholars, artists and commentators agree that hip hop is a cultural movement that originated in the 1970s among youth of African, Caribbean, and Latino descent living in the South Bronx. In her book *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, Tricia Rose outlines the context in the U.S. from which rap music and hip hop culture emerged – from displacement, urbanization and industrialization. According to Rose, in rap, relationships between black cultural practice, social and economic conditions, technology, sexual and racial politics are constantly changing. Rose argues in her newer book,

Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop – And Why It Matters

(2013), that hip hop has drastically changed due to commercialization. This commercialization which has occurred since the middle and late 90s, according to Rose, encourages images that are overwhelmingly violent, misogynistic and harmful to black people in the U.S. However, hip hop remains to be a site for knowledge production and dissemination (Rose, 1994, p. 95).

Having originated in the U.S. and spread globally, the art takes on local flavors internationally as artists use local languages, instruments and music styles mixed with other styles. However, there are still instances where hip hop harkens back to the origin of its creation by a people subjugated and stifled. These connections of resistance are mediated and spread during concerts and online spaces. The global studies of hip hop have often looked at how hip hop elements – most frequently rapping and deejaying – and the use of hip hop beats and musicality have been appropriated in local contexts around the world. In Asia, rap⁴ music and hip hop culture has existed since the 1980s, becoming popular in night club scenes in Japan, as participants of the hip hop culture use hip hop to revolutionize societal norms by encouraging the sense of individualism (Condry, 2001), while K-Pop has gained popularity in South Korea (Lee, 2004). In Africa, Nigerian and Tanzanian rappers resist the language ideologies that favor English by using indigenous languages and using vernacular English in their song lyrics (Omoniyi, 2006; Higgins, 2008). In Australia, white youth in Sydney have used the participation in hip hop practices to construct their identity within a larger hip hop context (Maxwell, 2003), whereas Aboriginal and African-diasporic rappers construct hip hop as an extension of Blackness or “Africanness” (Pennycook and Mitchell, 2009). In Europe, the indigenization of rap music is

⁴ For the purpose of this dissertation, *rap* will be used in reference to the style of music, whereas *hip hop* will be used as an all-encompassing term that includes the music, fashion, and culture that also includes break dancing and graffiti art.

manifested in artists' use of local symbols in their promotional materials, and their discourse on local issues, which establishes a new lyrical tradition unlike contemporary pop or traditional poetry (Androutsopoulos and Scholz 2003). The global phenomenon of rap music and hip hop culture represents a new domain in which to examine how local symbols and language forms are used in certain shared practices, such as the making of rap music, to construct and reinforce new local identities (Bennett, 1999; Kahf 2007; Pennycook, 2007).

Prior to the political uprisings that began in Tunisia in late 2010 and 2011 and became known as the Arab Spring, local hip hop artists in the MENA region were for the most part unknown and marginalized due to strict state censorship. During the uprisings, however, hip hop was referred to in the media as “the soundtrack of the Arab Spring” in part due to Tunisian rapper El General's song *Rais al Bilad* (President of the Country), criticizing the then President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. Artists from Egypt and Libya also created songs and videos that spread quickly online about the struggles against dictatorship in their countries. This music contributed to reinvigorating national sentiment among youth. Ted Swedenburg, scholar of music and popular culture in the Middle East, has pointed to the importance of other forms of music, such as *mahragan*, or festival music, to inciting support during the uprisings, as well (2012). The Arab Spring uprisings provided a disruptive backdrop for new music and videos of all genres and gave way to new soundscapes and landscapes. Graffiti art was repeatedly painted over and yet reappeared overnight in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Below are images of art that were painted on a wall near Tahrir Square in Cairo in August 2012.

Image 2: Graffiti in Cairo



Hip hop culture has established a presence throughout the world. New forms of expression and resistance were created in public spaces during the Arab Spring uprisings as well as online, such as online forums that were started to advocate for gender equality (Al-Rawi, 2014). Women were actively engaged in activism against oppressive systems during the Arab Spring (Kareem, 2016 and Pratt, 2016). During the uprisings, the rapper acted as a national storyteller. Hip hop is a postcolonial art that, when taken up in the MENA region, is a response to orientalism.

Within the U.S., hip hop and Islam taken together relate to Blackness and opposition to white supremacy. In Su'ad Abdul Khabeer's *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion and Hip Hop in the United States*, the author explores the meetings of Islam and hip hop and the intersecting notions of Muslimness and Blackness that challenge and reconstitute the racial order of the U.S. (2016, p. 5). She argues that Blackness is central to the experiences of U.S. American Muslims and that

Blackness is a point of solidarity and a point of opposition to white supremacy among American Muslims. Could Blackness also be traced in the artistic work of MENA women rappers? If so, in what ways? One way, as further described in Chapter 5, is through two artists' acknowledgement of the extrajudicial killings of black people in the U.S. by police officers in the summer of 2016 and an expression of solidarity to the Black Lives Matter movement. The artists' participation in an African American aesthetic tradition – hip hop – fosters transnational solidarity and creates a new site for meaning making for the artists as subjects and knowledge creators within the digital realm.

1.2 POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST AESTHETICS

Since hip hop originated out of the U.S. postcolonial experience and the artists in my study are using their music to articulate their daily realities and resistance to these realities, I situate MENA women's participation in hip hop culture within a postcolonial feminist aesthetics framework. Aesthetics is knowledge that is derived from the senses. As Shusterman (1991) has argued, aesthetic reaction relies on the senses and the body, and rap music has an embodied aesthetic that cannot be removed. The elements of rap, deejaying, break dancing and graffiti writing are the verbal, aural, physical and visual representations of the artists' realities. Furthermore, according to Shusterman, artistic appropriation, style mixing, the use of new technology and mass culture, the emphasis on the local, and a challenge to artist autonomy are all characteristics that exemplify rap as a postmodern art (p. 614), which makes sense considering the time of the article's publication. However, the spread of hip hop today has made it a global art form. A hip hop aesthetic should inform audiences of the local realities of the artists. This is not to say that the representations or realities will not contradict one another, or that there will be a single meaning or interpretation. It does mean, however, that within the meaning-making

process of the signs of hip hop culture, there is an indexing or pointing to the socio-cultural realities of the artists and the communities and networks with which they identify.

Postcolonial theory refers to an orientation of thinking about, analyzing and discussing the relationships and impacts that encounters between the so-called first world and third world have had on the social, cultural and economic development of a particular people or area. Having emerged as a field of scholarship within the past forty years, particularly with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, postcolonial theory describes a related set of perspectives about knowledge, power, culture and identity – and these perspectives may at times be contradictory. National culture and a people's own understanding of their history are also central concepts (Fanon 1963; Cabral 1969). Postcolonial scholars have regarded African-American culture as a product of internal colonization (Spivak, 1997), one in which racist images from the dominant culture are reincorporated (Wallace, 1990). Cultural production - whether music, art or literature – becomes the site where postcolonial encounters are negotiated and, in a sense, archived and shaped. Postcolonial theory allows for alternative epistemologies and sites of knowledge production, which is crucial to the culture and identities of vulnerable or traditionally oppressed people.

The postcolonial aesthetic deals directly with representation, creativity, power and identity. McCarthy and Dimitriadis describe three motifs to help define the postcolonial aesthetic: counter-hegemic representation, double or triple coding, and emancipatory or utopic visions. According to McCarthy and Dimitriadis, postcolonial artists “challenge the ways the colonial imagination has sought to constrain third world subjects in reductive and simplistic discourses of racial and national origin” (p. 240). According to the authors, postcolonial art offers the possibility for transformation that cannot be dictated or predicted, but involves people

working together to “build change without the false security guarantees” (p. 249). As Bennet’s artwork exemplifies, this kind of art can open up alternative kinds of histories. The artist’s destabilization of authority of origins is a technique essential to postcolonial artists who attempt to envision a third or intertextual space. These artworks can be linked to broader examples and realities of human struggle.

The postcolonial aesthetic can also be an important site to realize cosmopolitanism and global political thought. Dhillon (2014) uses a Kantian approach to analyze the paintings of Amrita Sher-Gil, an artist of Indian and Hungarian descent, created in Paris in the 1930s. Dhillon describes how in *Self Portrait of a Tahitian* the artist critiques colonial and patriarchal structures by painting herself bare-chested alluding to French artist Paul Gauguin’s representations of Tahitian women. By fixing her eyes in an indifferent gaze of power and by making *herself* the “other”, Sher-Gil embodies a post-ethnic, global identity. In doing this, the artist resists exoticism, which the author defines as the “appreciation of, and engagement with, cultures other than one’s own from a perspective of superiority” (p. 173). Dhillon argues that theories for global art are needed. Such theories would take in to consideration artists’ biographies, movements across borders and their interactions with and references to other artworks. Postcolonial aesthetics depict relationships beyond the center-periphery binary. Postcolonial female artists’ self-representations and representations of women have the potential to place women in positions as subjects, using the same tactics that have been employed to objectify them.

The representations of women in hip-hop music and culture have long been a troublesome aspect of the music. The work of scholars positioning their critical work within hip-hop feminism has made strides in exploring the complex portrayals and roles of women in hip

hop (Collins, 2006; Morgan, 2000; Pough, 2004 and 2007) and examining how the identities emerging from this cultural production are taken up and appropriated (or resisted) in the lives of real women (Brown, 2009; Durham, 2014; Motapanyane, 2012). U.S. third world feminism offers a conceptualization of feminism that draws on the oppositional experiences of internally colonized communities in the U.S. and originated within the dominant feminist movements of the 1970s (Sandoval, 1991).

Sandoval introduces a new taxonomy for feminism that requires actors to “claim new grounds for generating identity, ethics, and political activity” (p. 9) and is based within an “oppositional consciousness.” This oppositional consciousness does not necessarily need to be exclusively “feminist” in nature; rather, it includes a broader history of interconnected oppositional consciousness and resistance as it represents and links the experiences and struggles of people within a specific context or “cultural region” as Sandoval explains. U.S. third world feminism represents the varied experiences of struggle against oppression exerted by racial, economic and cultural hierarchies prevalent in twentieth century America. Sandoval identifies five categories of oppositional consciousness, which are “politically effective means for changing the dominant order of power.” They are “equal rights,” “revolutionary,” supremacist,” “separatist,” and “differential.” “U.S. third world feminism is characterized by “differential” consciousness in that it enables movement “between and among” other forms of oppositional consciousness (p. 14). Sandoval describes women’s agency to shift between various ideologies and forms of consciousness as *tactical subjectivity*; women are able to strategically choose the ideology that is most beneficial at a given moment, allowing them to push against the power structure.

According to Sandoval: “Under the influence of this third-phase feminism, women seek to uncover the unique expression of the essence of ‘woman’ which lies underneath the multiplicity of her experiences” (p. 7). Based on Louis Althusser’s theory of “ideology and the ideological state apparatuses”, which lays out the premises for humans to be citizen/subjects whose actions –even in resistance – reinforce and maintain the dominant social order, Sandoval proposes a “science of oppositional ideology” in which “the subject-citizen can learn to identify, develop, and control the means of ideology, that is, marshal the knowledge necessary to ‘break with ideology’ while also speaking in and from within ideology” (p. 2). I understand the unique expressions of womanhood to be defined and worked out by women themselves, along for the “essence of woman” (p. 7) to be varied and changing. U.S. third world feminism and postcolonial aesthetic theories provide useful lenses by which to view the varied experiences and feminist consciousness that are expressed by women rappers in the MENA region.

One critique of third world feminist discourses however is that they rely on West-centric patriarchal terms such as empowerment, agency and selfhood (Mansoor, 2016). Mansoor challenges the notion of a fixed margin that is a space of passivity. She also challenges the notion of the third world woman having a fixed gaze on the center – that is, at the first world woman. Instead, the margin is a permeable space for the “agentive reconfiguration of the binaries” (p. 2). Rather than being fixed on the center, third world women may turn away from the center, not regarding it at all. This “non-relationship” between the third and first world woman allows for the third world woman to define herself on her own terms (p.4). The marginality, then, provides freedom from a fixed ideology of Western feminism, allowing the third world woman to choose the best strategy for her situation. “Her task is to speak on her own, in a non-relationship to any center, in a language which she understands, even if it not

understood by anyone else” (p.9). Articulation is agency. She is speaking to be heard by a white audience or an English-speaking audience, but within her own understanding. Therefore, according to Mansoor, the third world women’s position already affords her the agency with which to articulate her desires, understandings and experiences.

The (mainly Arabic and Persian) articulations and self-presentations of the MENA women rappers demonstrate a focus not on first world women but on the experiences that women face daily. Their messages are to be heard by audiences who can relate to these issues. I also relate the artists’ articulations to Sandoval’s differential *oppositional consciousnesses*, as the artists select the optimal means by which to express their message through lyrics, style and self-presentation. The artists can be compared to black women living during the time of the Black Freedom struggle whose oppositional consciousness was exhibited through their styles of dress and hair. In *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul*, Tanisha C. Ford (2014) describes how black women incorporated beauty and fashion into their activism during the Black Freedom struggle of the 1960s and 1970s in South Africa, the U.S. and England and Africa. She defines “soul style” as African American and African inspired hairstyles and styles of dress (p. 4). Ford reveals how black women in the mid-twentieth century deliberately sought to reconnect themselves to precolonial cultures, and, in doing so, redefine notions of beauty, black womanhood and style. Women were participating in the struggle daily by simply getting dressed. Similarly, the MENA women rappers each have unique styles that bring together their individual identities and the politics of dress as they articulated issues related to womanhood in their countries.

1.3 CONCLUSION

Hip hop as a postcolonial art has taken roots globally. The hip hop aesthetic is one which embodies local realities and is by nature collaborative. Artists are expected to mix and borrow styles, referencing other music or artistic expression. The rapper takes on the role of a national storyteller. MENA hip hop is especially significant since it is a response to orientalist notions that aim to define the region as being culturally inferior and threatening to the West. Spivak's (1997) notion of "worlding" is useful in terms of considering how particular areas of the world become defined based on an ideology of Western dominance (p. 243). The MENA women rappers use their music to speak back to this ordering of dominance and inferiority by affirming cultural heritage while at the same time speaking of social problems women face. A U.S. third world feminist perspective allows for multiple expressions of opposition and foregrounds women's agency to strategically choose how best to oppose a power structure within a given situation. The music and online representations of the MENA women rappers and their audience perceptions provide a more complex understanding of women's experiences and identities. The artists' music depicts representations of women's experiences and call for women's rights and protection. These experiences are produced, distributed and received across multiple texts: websites, songs and videos and women's lived experiences. The methodological approach of discourse ethnography, as I describe in the next chapter, allows for the observance of these experiences across multiple texts. I open with a scene from one of my interviews.

CHAPTER 2: FROM DOUBLE STANDARDS TO DOUBLE AGENCY: DISCOURSE ETHNOGRAPHY AND READING ACROSS THE TEXTS OF POPULAR CULTURE AND LIVED EXPERIENCES

On a summer afternoon, sitting in my sunroom, I adjusted my laptop screen and signed on to Skype to video chat with Rana⁵, a PhD student at a southern university focusing on technology in education. Rana and I had met the previous year at an international education conference and had remained in touch. She works full-time at her university in a tech support position and we had arranged this time during one of her breaks to chat about the music of the MENA women artists. Her parents are Palestinian and she spent some of her childhood years in Saudi Arabia before moving to the U.S. in high school. Her parents live in Jordan and she visits them annually. In preparation for our discussion, I had emailed her the songs and lyrics of Shadia Mansour (Palestine/UK), Malikah (Lebanon), Myam Mahmoud (Egypt) and the compilation song with Myam, Amira, Amani (Yemen) and two other male artists. I asked her what she thought were the main ideas or issues that the artists were representing in their music. She began by commenting on Malikah's song, "Woman":

I'm looking at the lyrics right now. One issue that stood out is the double standards between men and women; you know when she says if a girl spends the night out she gets labeled as bad, but it's okay for a man to stay out until morning. Nobody says anything, it's okay. And then there was, well I don't know if it's really an issue but more of acknowledging what women do in society. So she specifically focuses on mothers and uh...those two main themes stood out to me: the double standards between men and women in society in the Middle Eastern culture, as well as acknowledging, you know

⁵ Pseudonyms have been used throughout this dissertation in order to protect the anonymity of the speaker.

kind of a message to acknowledge everything that women do, that mothers do. I think those are kinda the two things that stood out to me the most (Personal interview).

Rana went on to describe how in her own family she had noticed the double standards growing up. For instance, her brother could go out at night with friends or take trips with male and female groups of friends while Rana's socialization was carefully monitored by her parents. Throughout our discussions of the songs, she reflected on the extent to which the artists' portrayals of women's and girls' experiences were relevant to her own life. As I will describe further in Chapter Four, the music became a mechanism whereby which she articulated her experiences, desires and choices both in her work and personal life.

Examining how the music of the MENA women rappers is received by other women from the region allows for the observance of a *double agency*: the agency of the artist who creates the music that represents the experiences of girls and women, and the agency of the female audience member, who reflects upon her own choices and desires within the context of a discussion of the music and its message. Here the recollections and lived experiences of women from the region are texts that can be referred to alongside lyrics, images and social media profiles of the artist. In this chapter I explain how the methodology of discourse ethnography puts the artists' and women's lives and voices at the center of discussions about them.

2.1 ETHNOGRAPHY OF DISCOURSE

Ethnography of discourse (or discourse ethnography) is a methodology that involves examining discourses in and around media texts. Within the past ten years, this approach has been greatly advanced by media studies scholars such as Jillian Báez and Aisha Durham. As Báez explains in her work on media discourse regarding the Latina body (2007), discourse ethnography draws on Foucault's notion of "discursive formulation", whereas discourses "work

within systems of knowledge and power that intertwine in different spheres, both institutional and everyday” (p. 193). It also draws on David Morley’s (1992) concept of “interdiscourse” – the process by which social subjects are created or brought into being across discourses, and builds on Martin-Barber’s (2000) notion of “mediation” in observing how media messages are “constantly engaged in everyday life public and private spheres” (p. 193). In this chapter I discuss *ethnography* and *discourse* and describe the methodological and theoretical benefits to using these terms together as an approach to examining how media relates to everyday lived experiences. I will then describe my sites and methods for data collection and analysis, which will include identifying the MENA female rappers online, selection of videos, songs, and images and gaining an understanding of the artists’ family and educational background through their online profiles or online interviews. I will also describe the audience reception data collection. My broad questions in looking at content mainly produced by women and disseminated via music and video sharing sites are: *how are women appropriating hip hop culture and fashioning it to fit their needs in their home societies? What are the issues that the artists take up in their lyrics and videos? What are the audience responses? What do women in the MENA region and abroad think about these messages?* I conclude that looking at women’s representation within and reception of popular culture messages can highlight local, national and regional issues of concern to women as well as provide a better understanding of transnational artistic connections via social media and music production. Discourse ethnography is the most appropriate methodology for this study because it allows for the analysis of how women use hip hop culture to construct information about everyday experiences.

2.2 DISCOURSE ETHNOGRAPHY: SHARING MEANING ACROSS TEXTS

Ethnography has had important methodological, logistic and epistemological impact on social science inquiry broadly, and, arguably, on how scholars and researchers view themselves and others within both the research contexts and within the world in general. The understanding of “culture” today has largely been shaped by ethnographic studies of “others.” American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) has been widely credited for laying out what ethnography necessarily entails: observation over an extended period of time and “thick description” (p. 5-6,9-10). While there has been a lack of agreement for what an “extended period” means – whether it is two days, or two weeks or two years – it is important to note that in technologically connected worlds, there may be some new ways of “being present” and collecting data. The idea behind ethnography as exhibited by early studies such as by Margaret Meade is that the researcher would act as a “fly on the wall” so to speak, blending in and recording the interactions of the natives, their customs and daily experiences. This understanding of observation sets the researcher up as though he or she is a neutral observer observing a static reality of culture. Geertz argues that culture is a structure of meaning: “Culture, here, is not cults and customs, but the structures of meaning through which men give shape to their experience: and politics is not coups and constitutions, but one of the principal arena in which such structures publicly unfold” (p.12). So culture can be understood as the manifestation of people attempting to make meaning of their experiences. A main criticism of Geertz, however, is that he fails to locate his theory of culture within a political or economic system.

Global ethnography examines circulations and processes at a local level while being aware of certain features of globalization (Burawoy, 2000). Global ethnography involves extending observations over time and place. Still ethnography tends to privilege the researcher’s

observations and may not be able to fully treat participants' or subjects' inconsistencies or contradictions. Daniel Goldstein (2002) argued that there is *desconfianza*, or a feeling of distrust and suspicion of the ethnographer among the people being studied. The main issue in his article on *desconfianza* and problems with representation in urban ethnography concerned how people being studied use the ethnographic process to preserve promote and control their representations. It is evident then that thick description is not enough. A more complete picture of subjects' lives and experiences can be reached through critical ethnography and by examining the discourse around those experiences.

A discourse, as described by Foucault, is a group of condition or context-based statements. Since a discourse is defined by the conditions within which it exists, it is a historical event or an *archive* of historical statements. Discourse is reproduced and spread in a context of shared meaning and has a great impact on knowledge production. As Edward Said (1978) has argued, the academic and artistic pursuits of representing "the Orient" have created a discourse of orientalism (p.10). Furthermore, Spivak's (1985) notion of "worlding" and concept "discursive field" both relate to how meaning is established and knowledge created about regions of the world in relation to Europe (see Chapter One). While the work of postcolonial theorists have brought to light how discourse systems and their colonial histories have impacted what we know and how we think about the rest of the world, they fall short at examining how such discourses may be enacted in people's lives. Discourse ethnography allows for the examination of how representations in media and contemporary culture affect every day lived experiences.

Whereas traditional ethnography relies on the researcher's observation and thick description, discourse ethnography provides a framework for examining how identities are constructed, disseminated and reinforced through various forms of media – television, print, film

– and played out in people’s lives. According to Baez (2007), using discourse ethnography as a theoretically and methodological approach allows for the understanding of the nuances and layers that bind text and lived experience together (p. 192). “Discourse ethnography is a methodological approach to studying overlapping, converging, and diverging discourses across multiple sites that might include institutions, cultural texts, and lived experience” (p. 192). Baez also suggests that discourse ethnography involves a collective reading rather than individual reading. This would address the issue of *desconfianza* among the researcher and subjects since the “reading of culture” no longer depends on just the researcher’s observations but on a set of shared meanings that is exhibited through discourse and received (or rejected or reworked) by the audience. Therefore discourse ethnography has the potential for greater collaboration since the subjects of the study (i.e. audience and also the artists) play a role in producing and reproducing discourse about themselves.

2.3 POPULAR CULTURE AS A SITE OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

To trace how the representations of women’s experiences in the music of MENA women rappers is received and recognized in MENA women’s lives, I first examined the online realms of the artists’ work and then discussed their music with women from the region. In this section I describe how I identified the artists, constructed biographical profiles based on the online archives described below, interpreted their music’s messages via the lyrics translation and content analysis of their videos, and elicited the perspectives of other women to provide feedback on the messages and reflect on their own individual stories.

The sites for identifying and listening to the music included: the songs’ videos on YouTube, the artists’ social media profiles, and websites that provided commentary about the artists or lyric translations, which will be described in the section on online spaces as field sites

below. I observed for two months the online activities of artists and took note of the text, images, music, videos and comments, on their social media sites. For one month, I made regular observations in the morning, at midday and in the evening. I kept track of the observations in a spreadsheet with the following fields: Date; Artist; Platform; Content; Audience Comment; Artist Reply; Views; Likes; Shares; Dislikes.

2.3.1 Describing the online archive

Since all the artists' music and videos are online, the online domains were critical to my research. I identified the artists and listened to their music online through websites such as Mideasttunes.com. The creators of Mideasttunes promote the site as a platform to display music for social change. Founded in 2010 in Bahrain, the website is devoted to showcasing underground musicians in the Middle East and North Africa. The mission of the site is to "bridge barriers of faith and geography to unite people committed to fostering constructive discourse in the region through music" (Mideasttunes, 2016). At the time of writing, there are over 1,500 bands and over 8,000 tracks on the website from various genre, including "alternative, jazz, funk, hip hop, grunge, metal, rock, experimental" and others. Recently the website has launched an online digital media production program called Mideast Tunes Academy to train youth in the region to host their own online radio shows. Another website I visited was Revolutionary Arab Rap, a blog dedicated to Arab rap (more will be described about this site below in the U.S.-based Media and Websites section.) Some of the songs on the website already have English translations of lyrics. For those that did not have a translation, I consulted native speakers of Arabic and Persian to provide me with transcriptions and translations. Finally another site is Radio Javan, an online radio station for Persian and Iranian music. The songs that I used for this study are in Table 1.

Table 1: Artists and Songs

Artist	Country	Song Title	Translation
Shadia Mansour	Palestine	Kuffiyeh 'Arabiyya	The Kuffiyeh is Arab
		Lazm Netghayyar	We Need to Change
Malikah	Lebanon	Ya Imra	Oh, Woman
Soultana	Morocco	Sawt Nissa	The Voice of Women
Soska	Egypt	Bint a-Masriyya	Egyptian Girl
		S'aba al-Hiya	Life is Hard
Myam Mahmoud	Egypt	Ana Mish Sigara	I'm Not a Cigarette
		Imra Hora	A Free Woman (Oxfam)
		Anutha	Femininity
Amani	Yemen	Imra Hora	A Free Woman (Oxfam)
Justina	Iran	Dokhar Rap	Rap Girl
		Kash Donya Behem Ye	I Wish the World Gave
		Dokhtar Bede	Me a Daughter
		Be In Azadi Bekhand	Laugh at this Freedom
		Ghadam Be Ghadam	Step by Step

Besides these three websites, I viewed the music videos, performances or television shows (talk shows or music competition shows) on YouTube. I read the comments on YouTube to get a sense of the themes and positive or negative reception on online audiences. To further explore online listeners' comments, I looked at SoundCloud, another music sharing website. SoundCloud allows for listeners to comment on specific points of the track. Looking at these comments allowed me to see what parts of the song were most liked or gained most commentary. In addition to these websites, I observed the artists' online profiles (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) for a better sense of their audiences and popularity. Table 2 below shows the artists and their online profile activities.

Table 2: Artists' Social Media and Online Profiles

Artist	Country	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	SoundCloud
Shadia Mansour	Palestine	x	x	x	x
Malikah	Lebanon	x	x	x	x
Soultana	Morocco	x		x	
Soska	Egypt	x	x	x	x
Myam					
Mahmoud	Egypt	x	x	x	x
Amani	Yemen	x	x	x	x
Justina	Iran	x		x	

For Facebook and Twitter, I liked or followed the artists. I reached out to the artists via email, LinkedIn, Facebook or Twitter. However, I was only able to make connections with two of them – Justina (Iran) via the mobile communications application “Whatsapp”, and Soultana (Morocco) via Facebook (see Appendix for interview questions that were sent to the artists via email).

2.3.2 Biographies and artist profiles

In addition to the artists' social media profiles, I also read online journalistic articles and watched and listened to interviews with the artists that were online. These online sources often provided important background information about the artists' family, education and served as indicators of the extent to which the artist had become known in her own country and abroad. I approached these resources as online archives which have played a role in shaping the artists' identities and connecting them to broader audiences. The points on the map below indicate the headquarters or initial start-up locations of the online media sources from which I drew the biographical profiles. News about the artists has reached each continents as the artists have been featured in Arab, Persian and international media online. The coverage has been in both independent and mainstream media. In the sections below, I provide brief descriptions of these online media archives that appear online and were generated by MENA, U.S, European and

Australian-based media sites. I will indicate the point location on the map in parenthesis since not all points are visible on the map.

Image 3: MENA Women Rappers Online Media Global Reach



2.3.3 MENA news and media

Coverage of the MENA women rappers has extended to text, radio, television, and online interview programs based in several countries in the region. According to its website's About Us section, **Now (1)** is described as being an online source for news, features, and analysis covering Lebanon, the Lebanese diaspora and Middle East region. The website is described as independent and nonpartisan, but not neutral, and it was designed to be interactive, allowing readers to post comments following the articles. There are both Arabic and English versions of the website. The site does not seem to be active; the last item was posted in December of 2016 and a message appears on the screen when transitioning between the different language sites that

is it “temporarily off air”. The 2013 online article about Yemen’s first female rapper, Amani Yahya, remains posted on the Arabic portion of the site. Similarly, **Mashallah News (4-5)** is described as being an independent, online publishing platform for ‘disOriented’ stories from the Middle East (2017). Created by Beirut-based journalists, it is run by a team of editors based in France and Beirut, Lebanon. The site aims to focus on urban issues, culture and society, and those issues that are not covered in the mainstream media. It is published in English. **Alrakoba (14)** is a Sudanese website published in Arabic that publishes news on national and regional political issues and art and culture. The website published a 2015 Arabic article featured the Moroccan rapper Soultana titled, “Moroccan artist leads feminist rap fighting sexual harassment” (Bugnabod, 2015).

A website devoted to hip hop in the region, **Mideast Dynasty (location not marked on map)**, is an English website and has published interviews with rappers from the Middle East region. Although the site appears to be inactive, as the last postings are from 2014, an interview with the Lebanese rapper Malikah was posted in 2011 and remains online. The interview was posted under the name Big Hass, who, as will be described below, is the creator of the first radio program dedicated to hip hop in the region. There is intertextuality within the archive as various articles and platforms may reference or relate to one another.

Aside from the online articles from various MENA media, television programs posted online were also a valuable source of gaining an understanding of artists’ biographies. **Al Youm (2)** (“Today” in Arabic) is a live daily three-hour news magazine that airs on the Alhurra network from locations in Dubai, Cairo, Jerusalem. The network’s headquarters in Springfield, VA (Alhurra, 2017). According to its website, the network is operated by the Middle East Broadcasting Network, a non-profit corporation financed by the U.S. Government through a

grant from the Broadcasting Board of Governors, an independent federal agency. Al Youm featured Egyptian rapper Soska in 2016 in a segment that lasted just under three minutes. Although the reporter isn't featured visually, he reports from Cairo and speaks in Modern Standard Arabic rather than Egyptian Colloquial Arabic. The segment shows Soska rapping into a microphone in front of a computer, performing on a stage, and presumably in her home, seated on a bed working on a laptop. She is shown exiting a door down a narrow, plain concrete stairwell and presumably walking into what may be her neighborhood. In worn jeans and high-top shoes, a pink long-sleeved shirt under a fitted black t-shirt and black cloth cap, slouched to the back covering her hair, she walks on the dusty ground past stacked tires and iron posts sticking up from the ground. "I walk how I want. I live according to my own mind" she raps in Egyptian Arabic (AlYoum, 2016).

Another program, '**Aish Sah (3)**' ("Live Right"), aired on an Egyptian channel, Sada El Balad ("Echo of the Country"), which, according to the channel's Facebook page, launched in 2011 (Sada El Balad, 2017). The channel appears to be funded by an Egyptian ceramic company, Cleopatra Group. The company invests in several sectors to promote development in Egypt, such as tourism, real estate, aviation and media. The company has both an English and Arabic website. The concise and crisp website features sharp images of Egyptian progress and positivity: clean factories, residential areas with swimming pools lined with palm trees, resorts, a field with lush green crops. According to the website, the channel reflects the realities of the Arab world, "boosts Arab values and reflects the Arabic culture" (Cleopatra Group, 2017). Episodes of 'Aish Sah until 2013 are found on YouTube and the program is no longer listed on the channel's website, so it is most probable that the show has been discontinued. 'Aish Sah attempted to project Egyptian advancement through featuring a variety of topics related to health

and social issues, such as care for diabetes and spousal relationships, and hosting doctors and other expert guests.

The program's hosts also varied, but all appeared to be in their middle to late twenties. A male host had medium brown hair, often cut and styled short, with a light beard and mustache. Seated behind a news desk, he wore buttoned collared shirts, t-shirts or sweaters that snugly fit the contours of his shoulders, arms and chest. The female hosts had brown or reddish hair, straightened and styled, and wore noticeable makeup with bright lipstick. Several of the female hosts wore a sheer top with a tank top or other shirt underneath, or wore tops with scoop necks or shirts that fell slightly off one shoulder. The 2013 episode for which Egyptian rapper Soska appeared as a guest was hosted by two female hosts, this time seated in a studio that resembled a brightly decorated modern living room. The two hosts sat on comfortable fabric swivel chairs while Soska sat at a distance in the corner of a long red wrap-around couch with chartreuse pillows that matched the color of the floor and had a glass coffee table in front of it. The appearance of Soska, wearing a light blue shirt under a hot pink vest with a pink scarf styled to the back, contrasts to that of the hosts. Throughout the show, Soska talks about how she started to rap and her aspirations for her music. Although the program is no longer being produced, the episode is posted on YouTube, presumably by Soska, under the username TheSoskagirl.

Laish Hip Hop? (12) (“Why Hip Hop?”) is the first weekly FM radio show dedicated to hip hop in Saudi Arabia. The show was launched in 2011 by Hassan “Big Hass” Dennaoui and became a platform for Saudi hip hop artists whose music wasn’t being played on other stations. According to an article on the website World Hip Hop Market (which will be discussed below), the aim of the show is to correct misperceptions about hip hop by talking about why people listen to hip hop, the essence and roots of hip hop, and featuring the music of Arab hip hop artists

(Jackson, 2012). In 2016 Big Hass interviewed Yemeni rapper Amani Yahya and this interview is posted online on SoundCloud.

Persian Paparazzi (6) is a talk show that has appeared on Iranian television channel AAA Music. The show is hosted by two different male hosts and features popular and rising young Iranian musicians. Episodes of the show are also found on YouTube and Radio Javan, a site that provides the largest collection of Persian and Iranian music online (Javan Radio, 2017). In 2015, the show interviewed Iranian rapper Justina. During the interview, the host asked her about how she got started, her family's impressions of her music, and her perception of rap as a form of expression.

2.3.4 U.S.-based news and media

Several U.S.-based media organizations or individuals have also covered MENA women rappers. Those that were most useful to my project are described below.

Al-Monitor (7) is a media site that was launched in 2012 by Jamal Daniel, a Syrian-born American and investment strategist (The Levantine Foundation, 2017). The site is based in Washington, D.C., features the contributions of prominent journalists from the region and includes English, Arabic and Turkish portions of the site. According to its website, it is frequently referenced by other mainstream media, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Reuters*, *The New York Times*, *Le Monde* and *The Economist* (Al-Monitor, 2017). A 2013 English article on Iran's rap culture, titled "Iran's thriving rap culture" describes the history of Rap-e Farsi since the 1990s and mentioned the major artists on the scene. Although the rapper Justina is not mentioned in this article, I have included in my study due to her recent presence in media from the region, such as Persian Paparazzi and Mideast Tunes.

Rolling Stone is a U.S. biweekly magazine that focuses on popular culture. There are international editions in countries throughout the world, and a regional edition for the Middle East published in Dubai since 2010 by HGW Media (Albawaba, 2010). However, the stories on the Middle East section on the main *Rolling Stone* website are several months to a year outdated, and there have been no tweets from the *Rolling Stone ME* Twitter account since 2014. Still, a 2011 article on the British-Palestinian rapper Shadia Mansour is available through **Scribd (8)**, a digital library and e-book and audiobook subscription service founded in 2005 and based in San Francisco, California (Crunchbase, 2017). The article, written by Janne Louise Andersen, a Danish freelance journalist based in New York (Andersen, 2017). According to her personal website, Andersen has lived in Israel and the Palestinian Territories while interning at the Danish Diplomatic Mission and managing a project that supported local hip hop artists. Her article describes Shadia's personality and experiences during childhood and within her family that have influenced her music.

Vogue Arabia (9) was launched in 2016 by U.S. mass media company Condé Nast. The magazine is distributed in several countries in the Gulf region, including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and the United Arab Emirates and is online in Arabic and English. Until April 2017, Saudi Princess Deena Aljuhani Abdulaziz served as the editor-in-chief. The founder of a member-only boutique in Riyadh, called D'NA, Aljuhani Abulaziz has a personal passion for dispelling misunderstanding surrounding modest fashion. "The Vogue Arabia woman is one who celebrates her tradition but also considers herself a highly educated global citizen," she is quoted as saying in a *New York Times* article (Safronova, 2017). With a cropped black hair cut, she is pictured in high fashion, modest apparel, including high-necked tops, skirts below the knees or wide-legged pants and strappy heels. Her replacement by a Portuguese editor of Condé

Nast after just under a year at Vogue Arabia suggests that perhaps her goals of changing the perception of modest fashion and providing a new perspective on Muslim women in the region were not aligned with the mainstream magazine's purpose. The early online magazine featured a story on the Lebanese rapper Malikah. The article provides insight into Malikah's musical inspirations, family background and career as an artist.

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (10) in New York City hosts an annual Global Exchange program that brings together artists seen as “thought leaders and change agents” by encouraging social change through art (Lincoln Center, 2017). The website includes images from recent participants: Voice of Haiti Children's Choir, Whirling Dervishes of Damascus, and Amani Yahya, Yemen's first female rapper. The Center's website also includes an interview of Amani by U.S. actor and rapper Daveed Diggs. During the interview, Amani talks about her first experiences writing, performing and her inspirations and ambitions for her music.

World Hip Hop Market (13) is a media and event production company specializing in non-U.S. based hip hop. Founded by American Greg Schick in 2004 in Chicago while he was selling old records online, the company has promoted festivals and events in the U.S. to promote the work of international artists. The website content is comprised by dozens of writers (World Hip Hop Market, 2017). A writer named Jackson published an article on Moroccan rapper Soultana in 2012. In the article Soultana is quoted as talking about her experiences being a female rapper, including an unwanted and inappropriate sexual proposition made by a male festival organizer early in her career. Following the article on the page are the English translations of her song “Sawt Nissa” (“Voice of Women”).

Revolutionary Arab Rap (11) is a blog attributed to Sean O'Keefe, who was a student at University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service. According to his profile, O'Keefe is

interested in “social and political change through the lens of Arabic hip-hop” (O’Keefe, 2017). This website was especially useful since it has a page devoted to female rappers (see Chapter Three for more discussion on female rappers’ page), and includes artists from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Iran – although Iran is not an Arab country. The names and images of artists are listed and often there are hyperlinks to online news articles as well as songs and videos on YouTube.

2.3.5 European and other media

The Guardian (15) is a British newspaper owned by the mass media British group the Guardian Media Group. As possibly the most renowned European media publication, it’s online website includes sections on politics, sports, arts, lifestyle, fashion, travel, among others. There are also several regionally-specific sections, including one for the Middle East, in which a 2012 story on rising Egyptian rapper Myam Mahmoud was published. The article describes Myam’s experience on the competition show *Arabs Got Talent* as well as the feedback she received from views of the show via Facebook. The article also describes Myam’s inspiration for her music, which comes from her interest in writing poetry, as well as her experiences dealing with sexual harassment and defending women in her music who have been blamed for their own harassment. An article about Amani Yahya was published on the website’s arts section in 2015. The article describes her pursuit to be an artist in a country suffering from civil war.

Culture base.net (16) is a database and information source on international artists that is the collaborative effort of five European arts and culture partners in Poland, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, and England. The website’s copyright is dated at 2007 near the bottom of the page. According to the site, the database specifically includes artists who have been involved in

cultural exchanges within the past ten years. The database can be searched by artist name, country or genre. When “hip hop” is entered in the search bar, 17 artists are retrieved; only two of them are women – one is the Lebanese rapper Malikah. The article, published in 2011, mentions Malikah’s background, her experiences rapping in the region, and her experience with a group of other rappers from around the world in Colombia, presumably as part of a cultural exchange event organized by one of the website’s partners.

According to its website, **News.com (17)** is Australia’s premier news site and part of News Corps Australia, one of the country’s largest media companies (News.com.au, 2017). The website includes sections for national, world, lifestyle, travel, entertainment, technology, finance and sport. In an article was published in the world section in 2013, Myam Mahmoud describes her music as a voice to proclaim the concerns of girls and women in Egyptian society.

These online articles, interviews, and videos are an online archive on the seven artists with contributions from every continent. The artists have been covered by media created by independent journalists, mass media networks, state-sponsored media initiatives or cultural programs, and individual hip hop enthusiasts. These online texts –and here I use “text” to refer to videos and audio interviews as well – not only provide information on the artists’ lives and work, but also serve to legitimate them as artists within their countries and globally.

2.4 TEXTUAL AND CONTENT ANALYSIS

The textual analysis piece of my research included the transcription and translation of lyrics to English and content analysis for the themes discussed in the music and imagery in videos and on the artists’ profiles. Some of these translations may have already existed online. For those that I did not have already, I worked on the Arabic lyrics and sought help from a native speaker and did the same for lyrics in Persian for the Iranian rapper, Justina. The analysis

included music from the 7 artists, and 14 songs. I analyzed the music videos based on how issues or topics relating to women and their positions in society are articulated. The aim of this stage was not to provide a single reading of the content, but to establish provisional meanings for how audiences may receive the music.

2.5 AUDIENCE RECEPTION INTERVIEWS –

After the textual and content analysis, I conducted audience reception interviews using a framework of three possibilities for how messages were received: a.) audience and transmitter share the same dominant ideology; b) audience employs a negotiated version of the code; c) audience employs oppositional meaning (Morley, 1999). The participants were selected from my personal network; all had an affiliation with a U.S. university. I interviewed eight women with family origins and connections in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Morocco, and Iran. The sites for ethnographic interviews were a local ice cream shop (2 interviews), the interviewee's home (1 interview), my home (3 interviews), and online via Skype (2 interviews). The aim of the interviews was to learn the women's perspectives on the music and messages and to see to what extent they agree on the artists' perspectives – in essence to see how the representations are being realized, performed or reworked in the lives of women (see Appendix for interview questions).

The interviewees were a purposeful sample comprised of women I knew with personal background and family connections in the countries and who themselves had developed some livelihood in the U.S. In each case, their lives in the U.S. were due to their or their partner's studies or work; all of the women had been engaged in or currently are pursuing postgraduate studies. All of the women identify as Muslim, though the topic of their religious practice was not directly part of the interview. Four of the interviewees wore a headscarf publicly at the time

the interviews took place. Of the eight, three are married – one has three children, one was living separately from her husband since her degree program is in another state than him, one was newly married – and the other five were single. I approached these women based on our personal connections or their interest; I knew all but one, who studies music at another institution was recommended to me by another colleague and friend from the same country. Two of the women I’ve known for around 10 years, one for 6 years, four for a year or less. While it was my aim to interview a woman from each country, I didn’t have any connection with a woman from Lebanon or Yemen so that’s why none are represented among the interviews. Although these women’s day-to-day experiences as well as their individual backgrounds differed, they all had made personal choices – to study, to marry or to not or not yet – that had drastically affected the course of their lives and in turn allowed them to reflect on perceptions of womanhood and their own coming in to being in relation to what they had seen around them in their families and home countries.

2.6 DESCRIBING DIVERSITY AMONG ARTISTS AND AUDIENCES

By calling the artists “MENA women rappers” I am assuming some degree of similarity across the individual socio-cultural contexts, and likewise for the audience members. However, I do not mean to construe the artists or audiences as homogenous groups. My aim to examine how MENA women rappers construct womanhood and how this received by other rappers is informed by previous studies of female audiences. Jaclyn Bobo has looked at how Black women as audience members and cultural consumers connect to the images of womanhood depicted by Black women writers. But one criticism of Bobo’s article on Black women as cultural readers of the film *The Color Purple* is that it positions black women as a singular, unified group. With this criticism in mind, I did not want to characterize all MENA women as sharing the same opinions

and experiences. For this reason, it was important for me to determine as much demographic and anecdotal information about the artists and audience members as possible. It was just as important for me to contextualize the reception within the particular person's experience as it was to locate it within a collective history or narrative of women's rights and experiences in the country. In terms of audiences, Morley's work proposes "a model of the audience, not as an atomized mass of individuals, but as a number of sub-cultural formations or groupings of 'members' who share a cultural orientation towards decoding messages in particular ways" (1999, p. 130). These audiences have "shared orientations" – cultural formations and practices pre-existent to the individual that frame the reading (p. 130). These shared orientations towards what it means to be a woman, and the continual reworking of them among MENA women, include a continual conversation and negotiation about dress and personal appearance, appropriate and expected relationships with men, professional development and family responsibility.

2.7 CONCLUSION

Discourse ethnography allows for the researcher to explore the construction of identities across various contexts, including spoken and written word, print and recorded media, and lived experiences. Now too, we can begin to look at the role online activity is playing in constructing those identities and fashioning new ones. As Báez (2007) explains, discourse ethnography "seeks to elucidate what Paul du Gay and Stuart Hall (1997) call the "circuit of culture," or the process in which representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation interact with one another to produce and sustain culture and communication" (p. 195). Whereas the work of Durham (2014) and Baez (2007) have looked at how U.S. third world women – black women and Latinas – are marginalized and exploited within media and society, examining the MENA

women rappers' messages and reception among other women allows for the possibility of exploring how creativity operates within social media, creative or sharing spaces such as YouTube to possibly challenge dominant discourses pertaining to girls' and women's subjectivity.

The multiple texts that I am exploring include online songs and lyrics, videos, journalistic coverage that includes articles as well as television and radio interviews, as well as personal reflections made during interviews with selected. The amount of coverage that the artists have received in the online domain "disorientalizes" the region as the music and knowledge about their work has spread around the world. The online spaces are sites for production, dissemination and reception as viewers access the music via YouTube or videos posted on the artists' Facebook pages or other websites I mentioned in this chapter. I have intentionally aimed to include the unique perspectives from eight viewers who listened to the music and watched the videos and reflected on the messages of the music. The meanings and significance of the music depended on the viewers own experiences or relevance that the messages had on their own lives. The artist biographies and profiles in the next chapter describe their transnational movements and connections with institutions abroad as well as the social support they received through their families. I begin with an excerpt of an interview with Lebanese rapper, Malikah.

CHAPTER 3: RAPPING FOR A CHANGE: PROFILES OF MENA WOMEN

RAPPERS

Being an Arab female hip hop artist in the region did not happen overnight at all.

I had to prove myself and work twice as hard in order to earn the respect and appreciation I deserve only because women are underestimated in the Arab world and thus need to surpass men's achievements in order to be heard or known of.

Moreover the negative image portrayed by the Arab pop singers made the situation worse (Big Haas, 2011).

Rap music is usually dominated by men, so it is harder for women to get into the scene. But in Lebanon, women are respected a lot. As long as you can prove you have respect for your peers, being a woman becomes an advantage. It actually helped me get a lot of support. I want to use [my fame] to help empower Arab women (Big Haas 2011).

These words are attributed to the rapper of Lebanese descent, Malikah, in an online English interview that was published by Saudi hip hop commentator and radio show host Big Hass on Mideastdnasty.com (2011). Rapping and performing for 17 years, Malikah ("Queen" in Arabic) is by far one of the most prolific rappers – male or female – in the region. Yet she has yet to release her first album. She has toured Europe, South America, Africa, the Philippines and throughout the Middle East region, performing all unreleased songs. She has opened for U.S. rapper Snoop Dogg and U.S. rock band Guns N' Roses and performed without being paid. Why does she continue to do it? In an Arabic interview years later she talks more about what she feels is her calling as a rapper and the message she feels compelled to deliver (Big Hass, 2017). Seated on a plush black leather couch in a small studio in Dubai, wearing a black leather jacket,

her brown hair pulled up, with black manicured fingernails and henna dye tattoos on her hands, she speaks thoughtfully and comfortably about how tensions surrounding the Lebanese civil war and later conflict with Israel in July 2006 have influenced her music. She speaks of “Malikah” as being her alter-ego. Lynn Fattouh – as she was born – is shy, smiles politely when spoken to, and is compliant. She is an account director at an advertising company in Dubai (LinkedIn, 2017). Malikah is provocative and likes to shake things up. We all have more than one personality, she says.

This brief introduction to Malikah foretells a common theme of struggle for recognition as a female rapper within a context which may impose preconceived ideas of both womanhood and rap. It also speaks to the duality or multiplicity of identities that the artists embody. The artists’ profiles in this chapter reveal various realities in the women’s lives, including how family relationships impact their decisions to rap, how the East-West binary is deconstructed via the artists’ connections with other rappers in the West and outside of the Arab world, and how the artists are participating as rappers for the sake of the message and social change. As the rappers do not economically depend on their music, theirs is a case of art for the sake of art. Their participation as rappers points to a “wordliness” or “anti-worlding”. Rather than being constrained to the artistic expressions originating in their regions, they draw on inspiration of other sources to reinforce national and cultural pride.

The Middle East and North Africa region – a constructed place and locale that I am referring to with shared cultures and colonial and liberation histories – a term that, although widely used in academia today could still be considered as merely an update of Edward Said’s “Orient” – is comprised of countries with populations with diverse cultural, linguistic and economic backgrounds. The artists from Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Yemen and Iran

have each arisen out of unique contexts that have influenced their music. They have often lived their lives transnationally, crossing and re-crossing spatial and cultural boundaries that separate the “Orient” and the “Occident”. Profiling the lives of the female rappers will reveal how the artists are opposing the dominant narratives of intrigue, gossip and scandal with which female artists in the region contend with (Abdel Fattah, 2010). This chapter is significant because while there has been some recent research on hip hop in contemporary societies in the MENA region, there has not been any significant scholarly work done that combines online music commentary sources and data from artists’ profiles.

For instance, recent scholarship has looked at the significance of hip hop as an art form in the Arab diaspora as a means of unifying various political or ideological perspectives (Isherwood, 2014). In a *Review of Middle East Studies* article, the author observes how unity is constructed by artists and audiences at a show in London in 2013 in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings. Tawil-Souri (2011) describes hip hop in the Arab Anglaphone diaspora as “a tool for sharing news of social and political realities, as well as a tool for political critique and mobilization” (p. 149). While such work draws on the concert and live show experiences to show the influence of hip hop in the region, the scholarship has yet to consider journalistic coverage that is available online through articles or videos or artist profiles that would give greater detail to the lives of individual artists. While recent scholarship on hip hop in Iran has dealt with artists’ lyrical style and representations of memory and allegory, the work does not provide much personal biographical information on the artists (Breyley, 2014). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, while Zenzele Isoke’s 2013 article “Women, hip hop and resistance in Dubai” touches on the lives of three female emcees living in Dubai, it does not take an in depth look at the context out of which each of the artists arose.

In this chapter, I profile each of the artists using both journalist and online commentary as well as the artists' own words through interviews or other online representations. Looking at each of the artists' contexts and situations individually reveals the unique realities, poetic traditions and traditions of local resistance in each context. The artists embody local and national sentiments in their self-presentations via traditional styles of dress and language use. At the same time, through their connection with English-language media, international organizations and by considering themselves as rappers and thereby belonging to a global community of artists, they dispel the East-West binary.

In the following sections, I profile the more prominent artists as well as newer artists. This chapter by no means serves as a complete account of female artist profiles from the MENA region; everyday there are women writing, recording, freestyling (that is, rapping extemporaneously), and this is evident primarily from YouTube videos made by individuals in their homes, or in local studios displaying their skills. The "Female rappers" page of the *Revolutionary Arab Rap* blog lists 92 female artists, and most of the list contains links to the artists' music and interviews (O'Keefe, 2017). There are several platforms within the MENA region that feature hip hop artists, including the competition television shows *Beit al Hip Hop* ("The House of Hip Hop"), *Hip HopNa* ("Our Hip Hop"), *Arabs Got Talent*, the website *Mideast Tunes*, a site founded in Bahrain and dedicated to underground musicians from the MENA region, the online radio program *Laish Hip Hop* ("Why Hip Hop?"), and Radio Javan in Iran (see Chapter Two for description of media sites). The artists I have chosen to focus on in my study have all been either featured through one of these platforms or have been established and have become well-known through attention from national and international media, record labels or non-profit organizations.

I begin by introducing the artists who appear to have attained some commercial success through rapping, selling CDs and touring. These are Shadia Mansour, who is a British citizen of Palestinian descent, and Lynn Fattouh, as introduced above, whose stage name is “Malikah”, from Lebanon. Both artists have made a name for themselves and, as will be seen, have each claimed a stake at being an original Arab female emcee in the region. I will then turn to artists who have been established and were engaged with hip hop culture by rapping in their countries prior to 2011, the year that marked the popular social and political uprisings known as the Arab Spring – Soultana, from Morocco, and Sawsan Adel, whose stage name is Soska, from Egypt. Again, these two artists are more seasoned since they have been rapping since before 2011. Both artists gained most attention within their own countries and appear to be more interested in being a representative of national rap rather than being known as a premier Arab female emcee; their music and representations favor a national rather than a unified Arab-centric message. Finally, I introduce artists who have been rapping publicly via online and social media since 2011 –Myam Mahmoud, (Egypt), Amani Yahya (Yemen), and Justina (Iran).

By organizing the artist profiles in this way, I hope to show comparisons chronologically within these categories rather than solely based on the artists’ country of origin. In other words, as Dhillon (2014) suggests, I intend to draw more attention to the artist within a more global context of what is happening in hip hop, and move towards a theory of global art that takes in to consideration artists’ biographies, movements across borders and their interactions with and references to other artworks. To visualize this, the map below depicts the artists’ presence or connections to the countries indicated by their pinpoints.

Image 4: MENA Women Rappers' Global Impact



3.1 ARAB HIP HOP'S FIRST LADY: SHADIA MANSOUR

Image 5: Shadia Mansour



Shadia Mansour (Red)
 Malikah (Green)
 Soultana (Pink)
 Myam Mahmoud (Orange)
 Soska (Blue)
 Amani (Grey)
 Justina (Lavendar)

Known as the First Lady of Arab Hip Hop, Shadia Mansour was born in London in 1985 to a Christian Palestinian family from Haifa and Nazareth, the largest Arab city inside Israel (Andersen, 2011). Her first hit song was *Kuffiyeh Arabiyya* (“The Kuffiyeh is Arab”), released in 2011 and featured the U.S. rapper M-1 of the group Dead Prez. In an interview for *Rolling Stone Middle East* magazine by journalist Janne Louisa Andersen in 2011, she spoke about her family and upbringing, her first experience rapping, and being a leading Arab female rapper.

Mansour’s family’s activism and her own personal characteristics are driving forces behind who she is today as an artist. Being raised in London, Mansour did not feel that she fit in

at school, even among other Arab girls, due to her boisterous, attention-seeking personality. She enjoyed performing and receiving attention and may have been labeled a troublemaker for being distracting in class. Her parents took her to protests and Palestinian cultural events throughout her childhood and she became known for being able to perform classical Arab songs. She was musically influenced by popular classical singers from the region including Egyptian singer and songwriter Umm Kulthum, Lebanese singer and songwriter Fayrouz, Lebanese composer and singer Marcel Khalife, and Egyptian singers and composers Abdel Halim Hafez and Mohammad Abdel Wahad. Ideologically, she was influenced by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, political scientist and author Norman Finkelstein, Noam Chomsky, Edward Said and journalists John Pilger and Robert Fisk. She studied performing arts in London and appeared in plays and musicals and became a certified personal trainer to help finance her music career.

In her family there were writers, activists and artists. Her cousin, Juliano Mer-Khamis, actor, writer and director, founded the Freedom Theater in the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank, where he taught children about art, drama, writing and filmmaking, as well as computer skills. Mer-Khamis was the son of the late Saliba Khamis, the Palestinian leader of the Israeli Communist Party and Arna Mer, a Jewish Israeli peace activist. According to the article, Mer-Khamis had a profound impact on Mansour. “Mer-Khamis described his effort to resist the occupation through poetry, music, film and theater as a ‘cultural intifada’” (p. 62). In 2011, he was assassinated outside of the Freedom Theater. “Mansour has taken up this call and refers to her music as part of that struggle,” wrote Andersen in her article (p. 62). Mansour recalls Mer-Khamis’ commitment to the struggle for Palestinian liberation as well as working to open minds to issues of gender and culture. As an Arab diaspora artist, she feels a responsibility to carry a message that challenges close-mindedness in conservative communities.

Though she has worked with U.S. artists and has gained the attention of Chuck D of the group Public Enemy, Mansour's career as a rapper began serendipitously. In 2003, she was invited by Syrian rapper Eslam Jawaad and the hip hop collective *Arap* to Amsterdam to record the chorus of the song "Madinet Beirut" (*Beirut City*). One of the rappers was absent, so rather than just record the chorus, she was asked to also rap a verse of the song. Though it was her first time seeing the lyrics, she successfully recorded the verse her first try in the studio. Still, representing herself as the "First Lady of Arab Hip Hop" has not been an easy endeavor. According to the article, when she first began rapping, she tried to lower her voice to adopt a seemingly more masculine tone.

According to Andersen, Mansour's style is influenced by her background as being a London-born Arab, a female MC and having witnessed life in the Occupied Territories. She refers to herself as a Palestinian in exile. Her identity between cultures and languages is best portrayed in the song *Kuffiyeh Arabiyya* in which she likens herself to the Arab checkered, usually black and white or red and white, scarf. In the song, she says that she was raised between East and West, between languages, between rich and poor and that she's seen life from both sides. But like the scarf, wherever she is, she'll be true to her Palestinian origins.

Although she has collaborated with U.S. and European artists, Mansour maintains a unique style. Although she speaks native British English, she rarely raps in it. By rapping in Arabic she singles out an Arabic-speaking audience, while at the same time benefitting from English-language media coverage. In all her performances and music videos, she wears a traditional Palestinian embroidered *thobe*, or dress, that is black with red and white embroidery on it. She asserts that she wears the dress because it is a part of her heritage and is a symbol of Arab identity, not just Palestinian identity (Andersen, 2011). Mansour has given concerts in the

West Bank cities of Bethlehem, Hebron and Ramallah and has worked with young rappers in these areas in jam sessions (Donnison, 2010).

As a member of the diaspora, Shadia represents the complexities of displacement, mobility, and agency. Her family background of activism and the arts deepen her commitment as an artist. While she is open to working with U.S. and European artists, she is careful to maintain certain traditional gendered norms on stage, such as dress, as a sign of cultural pride. At the same time, she acknowledges that there must be change. This is exhibited in her video for her song “*Lazm Netghayar*” (“We Need to Change”). In the video, she holds up Orientalist images of what appear to be Arab women of past eras – one has a basket on her head, another is positioned among tall plants, as if she is an agricultural worker. The lyrics express her discontentment:

Our society is like the western time zone, it’s always late.

Each time we [presumably women] take a step forward, it takes 20 steps back....

We [women] are between 2 occupations, the occupation of the mind and the occupation of the country (Translation).

The music and artistic self-representations of Shadia Mansour depict a modern-day example of Palestinian womanhood. As Bouthaina Shabaan has written regarding Palestinian women, “The Palestinian woman has her family, her work and her struggle to look after” (p. 171). Shadia Mansour enacts all three through hip hop.

3.2 MALIKAH: CORONATION OF THE QUEEN

Image 6: Malikah



Lynn Fattouh, who goes by the stage name Malikah, was born in Marseille, France in 1986 to parents of Lebanese and Algerian nationality, and, according to her website, “raised in Beirut under the shadow of war”

(Winkler, 2011). This is in reference to the Lebanese Civil War which lasted from 1975-1990. Though she has only vague recollections of the civil war times, war and armed political conflict, remains in the psyche of Lebanon’s population and seeps in to the popular culture as well. A one-time bomb shelter, for instance, has become a popular club in Beirut, and, during a trip to Lebanon in June, 2015, I observed that the dance and clubbing scenes are vibrant as patrons embrace a carpe diem philosophy. Malikah’s transnational background and experiences living in a country affected by war have influenced her music. Over the past 17 years, she has attracted international media attention and, like Shadia Mansour, has gained a fan base throughout Europe and the Arab world. She is featured in online articles by Saudi Arabian radio host and hip hop commentator Big Hass and other journalists as well as an online promotional video for the facial product Clean and Clear. Malikah is also featured in Zenzele Isoke’s article on women, hip hop and cultural resistance in Dubai. Through these publications and representations, the beginnings and progression of Malikah’s music can be seen and described in her own voice.

Often dressed in slim fit blue jeans, sneakers, camouflage jacket, with her long light brown hair up in a ponytail, roll, or braid, Malikah first appeared on the Lebanese hip hop scene when she was 16. She worked with the recording label EMI Arabia after winning a hip hop

competition show in 2003. According to Ghanem's article for *Vogue Arabia*, one of her musical inspirations was U.S. singer Lauren Hill, although she also liked the music of Egyptian singer Um Kulthum and Lebanese singer Fayrouz (2016). Since then she has performed throughout the Arab world, including in Dubai, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Syrian and Tunisia, as well as in France and Switzerland, Colombia, Kenya and the Philippines. Fluent in Arabic, English and French, she rhymes in Arabic. She was the first Arab female rapper to reach the private French radio station NRJ's top 20 billboard chart in the Middle East. She has collaborated with various Lebanese and U.S.-based male rappers. In the Clean and Clear #SeeTheRealMe Arabic commercial that is subtitled in English, she says that although she has performed on a stage for over 40,000 people, she is very shy and that she found herself when she found hip hop (Clean & Clear Arabia, 2016).

The support and agreement of Malikah's family was necessary in order for her to perform. Initially, her family was not supportive of her music. In the commercial she describes how her father thought that she would lose herself. He told her that she was an Arab, a Muslim girl, and from a good family, and she should not sing on stage. But once she recorded some of her songs and let her father hear them and hear that she had a message, he then encouraged her. Although she does not say this in the commercial, not having her family's support would have likely created an unsurmountable barrier to her music.

In her 2017 interview with Big Hass on *Laish Hip Hop?* she explained how being a rapper and carrying a message of women's empowerment is something she feels called to do and she is grateful that she found hip hop. While some people may live a boring mundane life, she is grateful for this calling that has taken her throughout the Arab world and abroad. In 2007, Malikah was chosen by MTV Arabia as one of the two best rappers in Lebanon for the music

competition show *Hip HopNa* (meaning “Our hip hop” in Arabic). Also, according to her website, in 2008 she became the first female rapper to host, judge and perform at the Red Bull Lord of the Street contests in Beirut and Muscat, Oman. She also hosted 45 episodes of Rotana Musika TV’s music show *Shababi* which exposed the underground music scene of the region with artists from Lebanon, Syria, UAE, Jordan and Egypt in 2009. She was judge for two other rap contests in 2010: *Beit El Hip Hop* (House of Hip Hop) Finale on the satellite TV channel WANASA/MBC in Cairo, and the Chevrolet-Urban Challenge in Abu Dhabi, UAE. In January 2017 she collaborated with the Syrian orchestra and performed with them in London along with United Arab Emirates-based rapper Eslam Jawaad.

Malikah draws her inspiration from her daily life, what she sees or hears on the street or in the news or personal issues. In an interview for the online Mashallah News, Malikah is quoted as saying that she supports the Palestinian cause, the struggle of the people of Iraq and the Arab revolutions, the unity of the Arab world, and women’s empowerment and freedom of speech. She said that she “fights strongly against the stereotype of terrorists which has been bestowed on us by the West” (Tobia 2011). The opening English translated lyrics to her song, “Oh, Woman” are:

Woman, I am talking to you as I am a woman like you

I am not exaggerating. It is time to confront and plan for you

Woman, voice the cry of freedom in the name of every woman who cried or suffered in the name of humanity

This is the message, follow it in details. Man has decided that your life is destined for him to rule.

Don’t live in dismay, go work and earn money. Come with me in this march. Love your

sister and forget jealousy.

If a girl spends the night out, she is labeled as bad

But for a man it is ok to stay out until the morning, this is the truth for her to tolerate

You should take care of him like a child holding his feeding bottle after school

Stay independent and you will stay important. This is between us to resolve

We want to advance, we want to get an education, we want to shine and have control of our lives (O'Keefe, 2011).

Thomas Winkler, a writer for the culturebase.net website, was present in Manila in 2011 for a “Translating Hip Hop” workshop that was organized by the Goethe-Institut and Berlin’s Haus de Kulturen der Welt and attended by artists from around the world. According to Winkler, Malikah “represents a modern image of women” and her success in rapping is a “symbol of an evolved female self-confidence” (2011). Malikah’s music represents Arab female self-awareness as she is supportive of issues affecting Arab peoples and her lyrics encourage women to determine their own lives and secure for themselves a livelihood. She has gained a platform in the region through various competition shows and has been recognized by a variety of brands and international organizations. In her 2017 interview with Big Hass, she acknowledges that for a woman to succeed, it depends on her family, the country, the surroundings in which she finds herself. Being in Dubai and also possibly being economically independent allows her to have an international platform.

3.3 SOULTANA: THE VOICE OF WOMEN

Image 7: Soultana



Soultana, whose real name is Yusra Oukaf, was born in 1986 and grew up in the Ain Sebaa neighborhood of Casablanca (Rohan, 2014). There is little information about her family background and family's perspective of her music in the online media covering her. However, her experience since her youth in various international education and other organizations occurred simultaneously with the advent of her participation in hip hop culture. In 2011 she participated in the U.S. State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program and an artist's residency in the U.S. The use of U.S.-based music and art programs for diplomatic interests has been documented in Hicham Aidi's book *Rebel Music* (2014). At an event titled "Hip Hop Diplomacy: Connecting through Culture" at George Washington University Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communication held in March 2012, she spoke in English on a panel about her experiences with hip hop. This talk was recorded and has been posted on YouTube.

As she explains in her talk, Soultana experienced hip hop first at the age of 13 years old as a b-girl, or dancer, while she was studying at the American Language Center. She cited two influences as being Tupac and Aretha Franklin. At that time, she said it was not socially acceptable for women to sing and dance in Morocco, or for a woman to pursue one of these performative art forms. Her participation in hip hop culture, she asserted, is not something contrary to religious or cultural beliefs in Morocco; her music and lyrics represent what is real, such as mental and physical abuse that women endure on a daily basis, "by insults, by words, by

media, by everything,” she said (IPDGC, 2012). She wanted to make a change within Moroccan society, but felt shy and lacked confidence. She began performing with the group of the all-female Moroccan trio “Tigresse Flow.” In 2008 the group won best emerging talent at Morocco’s annual Mawazine music festival that takes place annually in Rabat, Morocco. However, even though the group won the competition that awarded the prize of a video clip and album, the organizers said that since the group members were young women, they would eventually get married and forget about their music and art. This attitude towards women in the arts shocked Soultana, who today is still traveling and performing. She has also faced challenges and disrespect within the industry. In an online article published in 2012, she described how on the evening before a music festival, one of the organizers called her over to his home. Soultana asked her father if she could use his car to go and, according to the article, her father was happy because he wanted to see her succeed. When she arrived at the organizer’s home, there were two other women and two other men there. She realized then what was happening, as the article states, “The man wanted me, Soultana, to ‘play with him’ in order to confirm a place as a performer in this festival!” (Jackson, 2012).

Soultana’s solo music video “Sawt a-Nissa” (“The Voice of Women”) was released in 2014. The song is about prostitution in Morocco and alludes to the notion that girls and young women are forced in to sex work in order to make a living to support their families. “So why call them names? They are struggling,” she said in her talk at George Washington University (IPDGCvideos, 2012). Since then, she has returned to the U.S. to perform in Washington, D.C. and co-founded an organization called Youth Vision in Morocco. In Morocco, she has visited villages for benefit concerts and has held workshops for girls to teach them about her life and how to write, rhyme and express themselves. After her time in the U.S., she went back to

Morocco and met with other rappers, males and females, and told them that rap and hip hop isn't all the same. Her organization, Youth Vision, is aimed at engaging youth through music and dance and she wants to encourage more girls and women to rap. "They all want to be like Nikki Minaj," she said during her talk, and continued:

They are not so vulgar. Rappers in the U.S. are just like us, they are talking about real topics, even if they are not well-known. Now I want to make this hip hop change in Morocco to build that self-confidence in art, especially for girls, because girls can't do what they want to do (IPDGC, 2012).

In another online Arabic article interview by Fatimah Bughnabud for the Sudanese website alrakoba.net, Soultana described how rap is the best artistic instrument to express youth's problems accurately and is the easiest way to say everything (2015). When asked why she raps, she went on to say that feminist rap is most able to receive the voice and worries and problems of women. It can tell those things that only a woman can tell, like inequality, and abuse, prostitution – the oldest profession in history, she said - and poverty, ignorance and societal oppression. Also women can express experiences with sexual harassment and violence, as well as other private worries that a woman has. She went on to say that rap isn't what it's rumored to be. It is possibly the one art form that charged and accompanied young people to change the time of the so-called Arab Spring because demands for change intersected with the lyrics of rap songs – those lyrics came from the depths of tragedy and suffering and desire for freedom from ignorance and tyranny. Rap, according to Soultana, shrouded those who were capable to lead an intellectual and social revolution. According to the article, Soultana agrees with freedom of expression but is against swearing and curse words. She says that freedom has a ceiling, which is ethics and respect. In this way, even though her song addresses the socially

taboo topic of prostitution, she still displays a respect for what is expected in terms of speech within Moroccan society.

In 2016 Soultana collaborated with four other female rappers from Senegal and Mauritania to record and perform for Jokko, a festival circuit in the artists' home countries – Morocco, Senegal and Mauritania. On International Women's Day in 2017, March 8, she participated in La Belle Hip Hop, an all-female festival in Brussels. Although she raps in Moroccan Arabic about issues pertaining to women in Morocco, she is connected with artists, academics and researchers in Africa, Europe and North America. Soultana is distinct among the artists rapping before 2011 in that she has been seeking to develop the field and train new artists, especially girls. Both her music and lifestyle display a consciousness to give voice to and empower women.

3.4 SOSKA: EGYPTIAN GIRL

Image 8: Soska



Sawsan Adel, known as Soska or Soska Girl, has been recognized in Egyptian media as the first Egyptian female rapper and was the first to rap at the Cairo Opera House (TheSoskaGirl, 2013). Though not much about her family background or personal

life is written about online, in an interview on the program “*Al Binat ‘Aiza eh?*” (“What Do Girls Want?”), she said that she is engaged and that her fiancé is very supportive of her music (TheSoskaGirl, 2017). Soska raps entirely in Egyptian Arabic. Her tracks include Arabic musical elements and instruments and sample classical Arabic music. In the 2013 talk show program ‘*Aish Sah* (“Live Right”), she describes how she was first a poet and that she got the

idea to rap when she and her friends were looking at videos on YouTube and found a song by Egyptian rapper and actor Ahmed Mekky in 2006. Since she liked to write, she used to write lyrics for other singers. However, as she said on the show, since she believed that she didn't have a good singing voice, she knew that she wasn't going to become well-known. So she and her friends recorded some songs and posted them on Facebook just for fun.

While her earlier songs appeared more nationalistic and touched on general struggles in life, such as surviving a car accident, she also writes about issues particularly pertaining to girls and young women. For instance, on the recent talk show, she performed a song with lyrics about a girl who goes out with her friends and the misperceptions that people have about her. She also has a song about the January 25 Revolution that commemorates people's participation and hopes. Soska's performance and self-representation as an artist is very localized as she has been the guest on a variety of talk shows in Egypt. She does not appear to have any international connection and attempts to *disassociate* herself from the U.S. in her song "*Bint Masriyya*" ("Egyptian Girl") as translated in English below:

I don't have to wear American clothes in order to stand out

I won't imitate 50 Cent and I won't be someone else (other than myself)

I say this to all rappers who challenge me

The definition of Egyptian rap ... it's not a disaster

Or something that's done mindlessly and we don't have to wear low-waste pants [like American rappers]

And it's not just music or something you do for money

It's a beautiful art, full of emotion and I'm always drawn to it (Translation).

Soska represents herself as an Egyptian artist but it's clear that in doing so she is pushing for change and acceptance within mainstream Egyptian society by disassociating herself from what is perceived as being foreign. Soska's own self-representation has undergone change as well. While she had previously worn a headscarf, as of the summer of 2016, her tweets began to feature images of herself without a scarf, but instead with straightened dark brown hair.

Soska's lyrics depict the complexity of her own position as an artist and performer in Egypt. When asked about the future on "*Al Binat 'Aiza eh?*", she mentioned a concert in Egypt and the prospect of doing some commercials. She also mentioned the possibility of going back to school to take more coursework and was thinking about the future of her marriage and possible new family. She said that she didn't believe that a woman should remain at home and raise children, but that she should do whatever she felt was inside her to do and use whatever gifts she had. Although Soska doesn't have a clear direction on where her musical career will lead, she said that music is the one thing that she cannot leave – it always comes back to her.

3.5 MYAM MAHMOUD

Image 9: Myam Mahmoud



Another Egyptian rapper, Mayam Mahmoud, gained recognition in 2013 as a finalist in *Arabs Got Talent*, a reality singing competition show. At the time, she was an 18-year old college student majoring in political sciences. As reported in an article in the *Guardian*, the fact that Mahmoud was *muhajaba* (one who is wearing a headscarf), caused some controversy – as Myam said, when people see her in a scarf, they don't expect her to be singing and jumping around on stage

(Kingsley, 2013). The representations of her music and work online depicts support and connections with her family and a network of rap artists in the region with whom she has collaborated.

According to the article, Myam's family has encouraged her since the beginning. As a child her mother helped her read poetry and her father encouraged her to write about issues that were important to her and those around her. In an Arabic interview with BBC World News, she said that she started rapping when she was about ten years old, as she was writing poetry and then started writing with a faster rhythm (BBC News, 2013). When the time came for the *Arabs Got Talent* auditions, it was her father who encouraged her to try out along with her brother. She hopes that in the future more girls will be inspired to rap and speak out against injustices in society even long after she has stopped (Kingsley, 2013).

The issues that she has addressed in her lyrics are problems Egyptian women and girls face daily: sexual harassment and a crisis of identity women face as expectations are placed upon them by family members and others in their lives. On *Arabs Got Talent*, Myam performed her song "Femininity" over the music of U.S. rapper B.O.P's song "Airplane". The English translation of the lyrics are below.

Women in our society are divided

There is the hijab [headscarf] and the niqab [face covering], and everything in between

There are many issues surrounding us, dependent on girls

About their clothes and their appearance, which wasn't originally a condition

How can you govern me about my hair or my scarf?

You look at me, I'm not going to be ashamed

You flirt and you harass, yet think that you're not wrong

I see you causing injuries, that is not your right
You need to be ashamed of yourself and get struck in the face
Understand that women in Egypt are divided into two camps
For men, not women, and both are wrong
Who said that women have to wear dresses?
Being a women is about thinking, the mind, education and religion
I've become a girl who doesn't have self-confidence
I've started to wear full make-up and wear colors on top of each other (Edinburgh Arabic Initiative, 2014)

In this song, she criticizes society for polarizing and blaming girls and women for the sexual harassment they experience in their daily lives and for causing women to be objectified with no regard for their intellect. In the interview she said, "I realized all the male rappers must have a track in which they talk about girls and their clothes – blaming girls for everything happening around us. That wasn't right. So I rapped about girls and the problems they face" (BBC, 2013). Harassment in the street is a daily issue that women have to deal with in Egypt. According to a UN report published in April of 2013, 99.3% of Egyptian women reported being sexually harassed and 91% of those surveyed said they felt insecure in the street (Kingsley, 2013). Being outspoken in her music about the effects of men's actions on women's self-esteem and self-worth led her to collaborate with other Arab artists on a song titled "Free Woman." The song collaboration was produced by Oxfam in honor of International Women's Day (see Chapter Four for more on the song).

While Myam gained attention from English-language media for being a rapper in a headscarf talking about harassment towards women, since at least the summer of 2016, photos on

her Twitter account showed that she no longer wears a headscarf and is pursuing a career in modeling presumably in Egypt. Her change in appearance adds another layer of complexity to her identification as a rapper. Both Soska and Myam construct local identities within their hip hop identities, although Myam's involvement expands beyond Egypt through her participation in activities sponsored by international organizations.

3. 6 AMANI

Image 10: Amani



My dream is to have my voice in every house. To be the voice of the young girls who can't stand for themselves (AJ+, 2016).

Amani Yahya is Yemen's first female rapper.

According to a *Guardian* article by staff writer Homa Khaleeli, Amani began writing and rapping in high school (2015). At the time of the article, she was 22-years old and had recently entered the international music scene, having been invited to perform at the Liverpool Arab Arts festival. At that time, her family had fled from war in Yemen to Saudi Arabia and Yahya's visa had been denied, so she was not able to attend the festival. Unlike the other artists, Amani raps in English because she said that she finds it easier to express her feelings in English, and also to try to appeal to Yemeni youth, who find English cool, she said (Khaleeli, 2015). Since the festival, however, she has participated in a collaboration project with four other Arab rappers – including Myam Mahmoud – for a song and video sponsored by Oxfam. In this song she rapped in Arabic. Her first song, titled “Maryam”, is dedicated to a girl Amani met who was forced to get married at the age of 11. For her, being

an artist is a serious decision that has dire consequences; she has faced threats in Yemen due to her music and the international attention she has received.

According to the article, Amani was raised in Saudi Arabia and returned to Yemen to study dentistry (Khaleeli, 2015). She began writing lyrics in her diary when she was in high school and taught herself to rap by listening to the U.S. artist Lil Wayne. When Amani was back living in Yemen, she became involved in the local music and arts scene and was inspired by Yemeni cultural heritage. According to the article, walking in the Old City of Sana'a inspired her. She would go for a walk there in the morning and hear older men singing and see shops with musical instruments. Even though there is a tradition of singing and women in previous generations were singers, there is no real music industry in the country today. She used to visit a small café near her home in Sana'a where people would gather to talk about music and books. Her friends from this group encouraged her to perform and so she did with a female guitarist. This successful performance led to greater exposure, as they performed at the French and American embassies, and the BBC made a recording of the two performing. This led to backlash and she received threatening phone calls at home telling her that what she was doing – singing in public and not wearing a headscarf – was disgraceful and that she should be ashamed of herself. The backlash that she faced made her determined to write and rap about issues women face in Yemen. The Khaleeli 2015 article quotes her:

I have personal songs, too - about my life experiences. But I wanted to be a strong voice for Yemeni girls and talk about their issues. I have songs about women's rights, child marriage and sexual harassment. People need to understand women can do things: they aren't just born for marriage and children (Khaleeli, 2015).

Rapping in English is a conscious choice so that her message can spread beyond the Arabic-speaking world. Practicing a marginal style of music within an already marginalized industry means she faces many challenges. But she feels that art has no nationality (Khaleeli, 2015).

In a 2013 article on the online Arabic page for Now, Amani said that she has faced many hurtful comments for wearing clothes that were typically associated with boys since girls in Yemen usually wear a black ‘*abaya*, or long gown. People would ask, “What was she – a boy, a girl or a monster?” (Al-Irani, 2013). Still she wants to encourage girls to pursue their talents and ambitions. According to her Twitter account, she is now based in New York. She participated in the 2016 Lincoln Center Global Exchange and was interviewed by Daveed Diggs, rapper and actor most recently well-known for his role in the 2015 hit musical *Hamilton*. During this interview, she mentions how she came to the U.S. to be a volunteer artist for the international organization Oxfam and how she wants to use her music to bring more awareness to issues in Yemen. By rapping in English and gaining support from international arts organizations, she is representing a look and perspective of a younger generation of Yemenis that people outside of Yemen would not know about otherwise.

3.7 JUSTINA

Image 11: Justina



Iranian rapper Justina, whose real name is Fareema, was born in Tehran in 1989. She started rapping in 2008, when she was 17 years old. She talked about her beginning, family’s perspective and background on an online interview with *Persian Paparazzi* that was posted in 2015. At the time, she was 25 years old. This

section is informed primarily by this interview as well as other online English articles about rap

in Iran. As an article for *Al Monitor* described, women who are musicians and singers in Iran have been officially banned from singing as soloists ever since the 1979 Islamic Revolution (Dagres, 2013). But women still pursue music and become skilled musicians. However, performances are regulated by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. These regulations have not deterred underground recording studios, performances and video productions. “Rap-e Farsi” refers to Persian rap that originated in the 1990s in Iran and draws on Iran’s poetic traditions and social issues and problems. It is within this tradition that Justina, who studied graphic arts in high school and completed her undergraduate studies in theatre, began writing and rapping. She raps entirely in Persian, although she started out by memorizing songs and using the music of U.S. artists; even her name – Justina – was inspired by a U.S. artist.

In the *Persian Paparazzi* interview, Justina said that she has liked singing ever since she was a child (Persian Paprazzi, 2015). She began listening to Persian rap when she was 15 and listed to U.S. artists Eminem and 50 Cent and would memorize the songs. One day one of her friends was going to a recording studio and invited her along. She was encouraged to try to rap, and they said that she had talent. She learned of a music competition and a friend encouraged her to send in a recording, so she submitted a song by the Barbadian-born U.S. singer Rihanna, “Disturbia”, with her own lyrics. She was selected and this led to her working with the group Tab Be Dah. As she stated in the interview, she chose to call herself Justina because she likes Justin Timberlake. The group consisted of nine other male members. She said that the experience working with them gave her confidence as others recognized her skills. The group recorded a track titled “*Tam Bali*” (“Idleness”), which was well-received. Even though the group has since split up, Justina is still in contact with a couple of the members and they encourage her and support her work.

During the interview, there was also a segment with her father. He said that Justina was always artistic and memorized songs quickly. He never forced her to study a particular subject, but he wanted her to do what she wanted to do. Her father recalled a pivotal moment when she attended a dubbing workshop and was chosen among the audience members to come up on stage and dub. She surprised the host with her skills. Initially, her parents didn't like her rapping because of the social and cultural taboos, but when they saw how hard she was trying, they accepted it. Her father said that he did not discuss Justina's music among other family members, but if she wanted to discuss it with them then she could. Although he prefers pop and traditional Persian music, when he listens to his daughter's music, he can see the poetry in her raps.

Most of Justina's music pertains to social issues or issues she's dealing with or issues connected to social events. Most of her songs are her original lyrics. One song is based from a poem by Fourough Farrokhzad. The interviewer asked her why does she appear aggressive in all her songs. Her answer was, paraphrased, that when a song is in protest the artist must be aggressive. She wants to express her thoughts and her feelings in her music and these feelings could be aggressive. "It's how I feel," she said. "I can't control it" (Persian Paparazzi, 2015). For instance, in the song "*Be In Azadi Bekhand*" ("Laugh at this freedom"), Justina is trying to remind women that they are important and have value, and that what is called freedom is not real freedom. She said that men are freer; for instance, women are not allowed to go out and return home late; but this isn't necessarily freedom, rather a behavior that may be considered negative. If it is a negative behavior for one, then it's a negative behavior for all, she said. She said that some men misunderstood the meaning of this song, but there were others who understood it and thanked her.

Justina and her father recognize that it's important for the rappers to give a message that is important to people. As Justina explained, when rap first originated, the music was mostly created in protest and later other topics and genres of rap emerged, such as party rap, and lyrics that dealt with topics such as drugs and sexual identity. But she thinks that when rap music first began emerging in Iran, the artists did not have the proper education about the history and development of rap and hip hop culture in the U.S. She sees rap as a style without limits and borders so the artist can say what she wants. She relates this to Iran's poetic tradition which included ancient poets who used strong words. In the U.S., she said, artists may be talking about drugs and sexual identity and experiences. But rappers should be real and speak about what influences them. She hopes that music in her country, no matter the genre, would increase so that all the world could hear it.

3.8 CONCLUSION

The seven artists that I've profiled in this chapter represent women's increased participation in and identification with hip hop culture in the MENA region over the past 15 years specifically, and, broadly, the notion of women as cultural actors exercising their voices in creative ways in the region. Even though all of the artists may have had some initial influence from or admiration of rappers in the U.S., each is adamant that she is not merely an imitation, but that she is developing her own style as a rapper. This style is informed by her individual experiences as well as a collective set of memories, narratives and realities within her family and country of origin. These profiles show each of the artists' individualities and how they each write out of their experiences. Their music is the soundtrack of their lives. They draw on traditional poetic and musical traditions as well as their experiences, and have a progressive vision for their own lives and the lives of other girls and women.

The artists' biographies and music speak to cosmopolitan lifestyles and awareness – even if they have never traveled outside the country. Shadia Mansour and Malikah have had transnational experiences with Europe – Malikah being born in France, although not raised there, and Shadia being born and raised in London. Soultana's early experiences with hip hop were at an American language school in Morocco. Soska names U.S. rapper 50 Cent her song as part of her self-identification claims of what she is not. Myam, Amani and Justina each have also sampled music from U.S. artists or cite listening to them or being fans.

The cosmopolitan awareness of the artists may also put them in touch with postcolonial struggles in other places. For example, Shadia Mansour has collaborated with Chilean-French rapper Ana Tijoux on a song, "*Somos Sur*" ("We are the South") in which each raps about postcolonial struggle in Chile and Palestine with regard to land rights, in Spanish and Arabic respectively. Soultana has also collaborated with female rappers from Senegal and Mauritania, and Myam and Amani have collaborated with other Arab rappers, as I explain in the following chapter. These collaborations denote a solidarity among the artists and they are even more connected due to online music and video sharing and media coverage. The artists' lives and creative practices dismantle orientalist claims that divide the region from the rest of the world. In the following chapter, I show how the artists portray women's agency and liberation in their songs and how their music has resonated with the audience interviewees. I open with a scene from Iranian rapper Justina's video.

CHAPTER 4: *KASH DONYA (I WISH THE WORLD...): MENA WOMEN RAPPERS'*

REPRESENTATION OF AGENCY AND LIBERATION

In a grassy, wooded area, Iranian rapper Justina and a young girl are playing together – swinging on a swing, laying in the grass, holding hands. As the video opens and the music starts, the girl is running and leaping through the dry grass. With arms outstretched, skimming the tall grasses around her, she runs into the arms of Justina, who picks her up and spins around elated. Justina is dressed in jeans and a greyish black fur-lined coat with the hood up while the girl wears jeans and a black coat with her head uncovered, revealing her dark hair hanging to the middle of her back and shining in the sunlight. The scene dims and the next shot is of Justina and the girl in the wooded area, with yellow-gold flowers and the sun shining brightly behind them. They are facing one another and holding hands. With the girl's back to the camera, Justina is looking down intently, smiling, and begins, "I wish the world gave me a girl so that I could give her all that I didn't have" (SSdelux1, 2014). She continues:

I wish the world gave me a girl...not to be a toy girl for a night.

To explore true love, not to be a slave to her body.

Don't want her to follow my mother's steps, not to be silent.

Not to descend from her high flight, to daydream.

I wish the world gave me a daughter. No one gossips if she becomes a widow.

I want her to know she is not arable land. She's not an hourly religious verse.

I wish the world gave me a daughter. No one would become extinct from [seeing] her hair. She wouldn't waste a man's life if she couldn't bear children.

I wish the world gave me a daughter. To have mercy on married women. To breathe without men's permission. To draw a free bird without a cage,

I don't want her to be an angel, mistakes are a part of earthly life. I want her to be a woman, to die as a woman. Being women is what it's really all about.

I wish the world gave me a daughter. To know the world is going to be a good place for her. Where there are no struggles to fight against the injustice of women's abuse (SSdelux1, 2014).

The scenes and lyrics from Justina's song "I Wish the World Gave Me a Daughter" ("*Kash Donya Behem Ye Dokhtar Bede*") depicts themes that are common across her music as well as that of the other rappers. The seven artists – Shadia Mansour (Palestine), Malukah (Lebanon), Soultana (Morocco), Soska (Egypt), Myam Mahoud (Egypt), Amani Yahya (Yemen), and Justina (Iran) – incorporate national and regional problems into their lyrics. While some artists' songs deal directly with issues/problems concerning women, such as child marriage (Amani), street harassment (Myam), and the negative perception against sex workers (Morocco), other songs represent patriotic or nationalistic messages. Through hip hop, the artists exercise *oppositional consciousnesses* to social norms concerning women's socialization and sexuality as well as to U.S. or European-dominated power structures. They do this while maintaining positions as artists from the region and construct a femininity that puts women's voices at the center.

In this chapter I discuss the dominant themes in the artists' music, videos and online representations and the dominant themes of the audience's perceptions. In the first part I deal with the artists' themes, which are: *women's liberation* from legal and social codes that restrict social behaviors and fail to protect women from abuse, and *women's agency* in her appearance, socialization and professional choices. In the second part I will address the themes perceived by the audience, which are: their experiences with sexual harassment, social pressures and

expectations, and preservation of cultural heritage. The themes follow a motif of postcolonial aesthetics of emancipatory and utopic visions (McCarthy and Dimitriadis, 2000).

4.1 LIBERATION

One of the dominant themes of the music is the artists' imagination of women's liberation from legal and social systems that fail to protect women from abuse. These laws and social codes within the particular country create an overemphasis on the monitoring of women's behavior while at the same time neglecting her welfare within society. One such depiction is the mandatory hijab or headscarf for women in Iran. This is alluded to in Justina's video already mentioned above. The video depicts the girl's ninth birthday. She opens a gift box and inside is a white scarf. The girl frowns as she drapes the scarf over her head, indicating her resentment and disappointment. Another scene in the video shows the girl seated on a bench beside a boy of her age. The two smile at each other and he offers her his hand. As the girl places her hand on top of his, a hand in a white glove comes in from behind the bench and pushes the girl's hand away. Finally, scenes near the end of the video depict a young woman with a black eye. At the end of the video the woman shows her palm to the camera and written on it in English is, "Stop violence against women." The video suggests that the control of the girl's dress and the restriction of her socialization with boys is related to physical abuse against women. Other artists also mention the headscarf and women's coverings – Soska (Egypt) has referenced the headscarf she wore as an indicator of her patriotism and authenticity as an Egyptian woman, and Myam (also from Egypt) who also was wearing a scarf, acknowledges a spectrum of women's dress, from headscarf, to face covering, to no covering. In Justina's video, however, the forced headscarf policy is represented as enforcing a material on a girl that denies her of her individuality. Other artists in their songs deal with the *lack of* laws that protect women from harassment and child marriage.

The chorus of Myam Mahmoud's song "*Ana Mish Sigara*" ("I am Not a Cigarette") is about the need for a law in Egypt that will protect women against sexual harassment and assault.

We want a law that will bring order to that which is in disarray

We want a law that will keep girls far from worries and harm

You'll tell me there is a law, I'll say, "Where is it, man?"

Those who don't follow the law we already have are like the blind (Translation).

Myam Mahmoud's song performed on *Arabs Got* is a bold proclamation against the social pressures women face daily – including sexual harassment in public spaces such as in the streets – as well as the objectification of women to bolster men's positions. During the performance, she wears blue jeans, a white shirt and yellow jacket and pink headscarf. She points her arm, rocks back and forth and marches across the stage in front of images of her own digitalized headshot in various colors, colorful shapes, a silhouette of a woman's body in a dress, standing beside a man in suit as bride and groom. Colorful smoke shoots up from the stage at several times throughout her performance. The three judges (one woman and three men) listen, somewhat intently, somewhat perplexed as if trying to understand the words. She counts down, "Three, two, one," and the music begins, keyboard chords syncopated with a beat, and after the refrain, begins:

I'm not a cigarette; I'm not like you say I am

My end is not when you stomp on me and I won't allow you to humiliate me

I'm not a necktie that strangles you while at the same time making you look respectable

And anyway, why would I know you if you weren't respectable in the first place?

Have you ever tried to imagine what it's like to be a girl walking in the street?

She feels preyed upon and quickens her steps

And if anyone harasses her, she is in the wrong
It's not respectable if you answer, even if your dignity is humiliated
Some of us see that the solution is a cover (i.e. hijab)
And if the girl hides herself, then she won't suffer
Ok, if we really believe this, then I have a question for you:
What is the most deprived country? Afghanistan.
Control yourself and don't control me
If the sunlight (metaphor for a woman) comes close to you, you'll be harmed
Now they ask who is to blame
Whoever says that he is right, we are going to say, "No! (Translation)

The lyrics of the song refer to the fact that there is no working law against sexual harassment in Egypt and victims are thought to have provoked the offenders by inappropriate dress or behavior. There is no protection for women against street harassment except their own mechanisms of self-defense. The issue of street harassment has gained attention in popular culture in Egypt with such films as 6,7,8 which depicts the lives of three women from upper, middle and working class backgrounds in Cairo who all experience sexual assault and harassment by strangers in public spaces – on a bus, walking in the street during the day, and among a crowd after a soccer game. The experiences deeply affect them and their personal relationships as the men in their lives are not always supportive of their choices to speak out about what happened to them. The film also depicts how women may defend themselves against perpetrators using pins, knives and other sharp objects if they are groped in public.

The chorus of the song calls for a law that will hold perpetrators accountable for harassment and abuse of women rather than victim-blaming or minimizing such instances. The

verses address women's worth by mentioning a popular Egyptian saying that a woman is like a necktie – she chokes a man but makes him look respectable. This is the ultimate objectification of a woman, reducing her to an accessory to serve the purpose of a man's appearance. Myam overturns this statement by not only saying that a woman is more than this, but questioning why would she want to be with an unrespectable man in the first place? Her lyric puts the agency on the woman and guides the listener to think of the woman's tastes and interests. The verse goes on to condemn the victim-blaming against girls and young women who respond to their perpetrators on the streets. She also criticizes those who say that if a woman would cover herself then she would not be violated by citing Afghanistan as a place where women must wear a headscarf. The second verse calls on women to speak up and to remember their past roles in Egypt's independence and in women's rights movements in the past. The lack of law that protects women against harassment and sexual assault undermines women's contributions to the nation throughout Egyptian history.

Amani Yahya's song "Beautiful Girl" deals with the issue of child marriage in Yemen. According to an interview done by BBC, the song was inspired when Amani learned of an 11-year old girl named Mariam who was forced to marry (amin albahrey Yemen, 2015). Although there have been proposals to reform the marriage laws in Yemen, setting the minimum age to 18 years, these reforms have been stalled since the civil war's beginning in 2015 that has devastated much of the country (Al Qalisi, 2017). The financial strains that families face create an environment in which young girls are sold off in marriage. Besides these critiques on legal codes that represent control over women's lives and fail to protect them against harassment and abuse, the artists' songs and videos also refer to social codes affecting women, especially regarding perceived relationships with men and sexuality.

Each of the artists through their music expresses a desire for women to be liberated from social pressures and expectations of women's behaviors. Acceptable behaviors and roles that are referred to throughout the songs include: performing well in school, being physically attractive, being social among peers – but not too social with boys – partnering with a man, mothering within a socially sanctioned relationship with a man, and being a school teacher. Unacceptable behaviors include: going out late at night as a single woman, defending oneself against a man who is being verbally harassing, expressing love for a man that one admires, and the perception of any kind of sexual activity outside of marriage. If any of these codes are not followed, then the woman is to blame. Each of the artists mention one or more of these codes in their music. The social standards and pressure placed on women is most poignantly described in Justina's song "*Be In Azadi Bekhand*" ("Laugh at this Freedom"), in which she directs the message towards men:

I want to talk but for a short while

Since it has been said that the shorter the word the better its understood

I'm not saying these things to humiliate you

Understand that the words which I speak are not a threat

My opposite sex, observe that

All eyes are on you to continue the paternal line

And prayers are recited around the belly of a mother who wants to fundamentally change

If you come out, she'll make the world restless

My opposite sex, see that I'm not stabilized (not accepted in the society)

I'm for you a creature which has not been defined

You, you were brought up by someone of my kind (my gender)

She taught you that my laughter is a little bit improper
If it is wrong for me to be out late
If swearing profanities was not for me
If they are not surprised by your ill-behavior
If sleeping around is a sign of supremacy
If I'm the inordinate desire that you are after (literal translation: if I'm the worm in the tree that you are after)
If you hit and run [sexual metaphor], I'll be called a slut
If the difference between your desires and my desires is indecency
If you have come to view the body as something worthless
If your betrayal is due to my lack of femininity
If my betrayal is against the feminine nature
If sometimes I prefer money over you
If you replace me when you come to money
If you'll tear apart the wolves who prey upon your honor
If you, yourself, become a wolf and prey on other's honor
If my virginity and boldness becomes important for you
If you only desire me when I'm in bondage
If you wouldn't be satisfied even if you are in heaven (literal translation: if your eyes wouldn't be satisfied even if you were in heaven)
If I don't have a nice body, you would not care for me
If I am constantly searching for someone better than you
If menopause puts me out of the loop

If I am cause for you to descend to hell
If you have an ounce of will left in you
Let me tell you that you've been in captivity all your life
They tell you that it is in your nature, how could they insult you so easily
I swear that these ifs are all about your worth and value
How long are you going to continue to accept this indecisiveness?
Why don't you for once stamp the seal of disapproval on indecency?
For once, you should sing and talk about your good qualities
Look! My opposite sex, laugh at this freedom.
Understand your true value, and laugh at this freedom
Look! My opposite sex, laugh at this freedom.
Understand your true value, and laugh at this freedom
Yes laugh... laugh at this freedom... laugh

The message in this song is that if a behavior is not beneficial for one, then it is not beneficial for any. The artist proclaims that all the freedoms that men enjoy in society are not actual freedoms, but are the results of an oppression of women. She calls on men to stand with her and laugh at these so-called freedoms.

In her song "*Sawt Nissa*" ("Voice of Women") Soultana brings attention to the plight of women engaged in sex work in Morocco. She does this by calling attention to the lack of financial support for unmarried women with children. According to a government report, there are over 19,000 prostitutes in the cities of Rabat, Agadir, Tangier and Fez (Dwyer, 2016). Most of the women are separated or divorced and about half of them have dependent children. Although prostitution is prohibited and punishable by imprisonment, the Ministry of Health

supports medical centers and nongovernmental organizations that provide anonymous HIV screenings and other services. The lives of women working in prostitution gained recent national and international attention with the release of the film *Much Loved* by filmmaker Nabil Ayouch. The film, which depicts the lives of four women working in Marrakech, was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2015 but banned by the Moroccan Ministry of Communications. Although the issue is of concern and discussed within the government, among artists and scholars, it is never the case that the public hears the voices of the women engaged in the work.

Soultana's "*Sawt Nissa*" was released in 2010 and the video for the song the following year. There are several images in the video that depict the voiceless, faceless women engaged in sex work. In the middle of the song there is a still image of two women seated with their hair hanging over their face, wearing a short skirt and tank top. The image mainly shows the flesh of one woman's crossed legs, arms and hair. A police officer stands behind them to the right, facing the camera with his hands on his hips. The image pauses on the screen for a couple of seconds before changing to the image of the back of a woman in a short tight black dress and black boots leaning in to the passenger window of a car stopped on a busy street at night. Next appears an image of a young girl with stringy hair and a dirty face holding a piece of bread, looking up at the camera. The images are situated in the middle of the black and white video, which depicts Soultana driving, smiling and talking, walking in a street wearing jeans, a vest and knit hat over box braids. There are also clips of her performing on a stage for a lively audience and various street shots of a market and of women walking together, some wearing long dresses and scarves and others in jeans and long-sleeved shirts without head scarves. The images in the video show women in public spaces as Soultana's lyrics claim to be a voice for all of them.

Throughout the lyrics of the song, Soultana takes on different voices – she’s the voice of a woman who has a friend working in sex work to appease an abusive lover; she is the voice of a woman engaged in sex work who is suffering from humiliation and a loss of self; she is the voice of condemnation to those who pay for the women’s services and judge them at the same time. Soultana’s song is a strong example of how art speaks and answers back to the public about social problems. Rather than seeing the women as the problem, the song brings in other institutional actors: economic systems and social welfare. In societies with high rates of unemployment and social welfare systems that do not support abused women leaving dangerous living situations, there are few options a woman has to provide for herself and children. Overall Soultana’s message is one of compassion and unity among women and men – it could have been you, me, your mother or daughter, engaged in this work, she says.

The lyrics and videos of the songs of the rappers refer to legal and social codes that have, according to the artists, done more to control women’s bodies and self-representation than protect them from harassment and abuse. The artists exhibit a resistance to social codes that define a woman’s existence in terms of her relationship with a man, and blame women for the violence to which they’ve been subjected. The music is an imagination of a new social order in which the same social and legal standards which are afforded to men are given to women as well. In addition to the resistance to the legal and social structures, the music also depicts women’s individual and collective agency.

4.2 AGENCY

The other main theme expressed throughout the artists’ work is women’s agency concerning her appearance, socialization and professional choices. Rather than being guided by predetermined social rules, girls and women should consider their own individual preferences,

talents and abilities. The artists assert this message while operating from within the social systems, making their lives a testing ground for the messages they proclaim.

Myam's song "Femininity" describes how social codes in Egypt governs women's dress and appearance:

Women in our society are divided

There is the hijab [headscarf] and the niqab [face covering], and everything in between

There are many issues surrounding us, dependent on girls

About their clothes and their appearance, which wasn't originally a condition

How can you govern me about my hair or my scarf?

....

If we ask whether girls have taste in clothing

Obviously, they do, but life isn't about appearances

Life's gotten materialistic and everyone wants something

The price of life is high and sweeter than before

At the time she performed this song, Myam was wearing a headscarf. Today, however, she does not. This decision she made regarding her appearance is an example of the freedom of choice and change that she speaks about in her music.

Soska referred to the scarf which she wore as a symbol of nationalism. In her song "*Bint Masriya*" ("Egyptian Girl"), Soska represents herself as an authentic Egyptian rapper by mentioning her appearance and style of dress, expressing love for Egypt and disregard for the U.S. She performed the song on Egyptian talk show *Laila Ma' Hani* ("Night with Hani"). When host Hani Ramzi introduces her, he comments that she is fully Egyptian and rapping in a

localized, popular way (TheSoskaGirl, 2013). Soska appears with the microphone and wearing jeans, a white button-up shirt and black neck-tie and a black vest over it and white head scarf. The music begins, strings and a beat and she motions to the audience to begin to clap with the beat.

I don't have to wear American clothes in order to stand out

I won't imitate 50 Cent and I won't be someone else

I say this to all rappers who challenge me

The definition of Egyptian rap ... it's not a disaster

Or something that's done mindlessly and we don't have to wear low-waist pants

....

I am Egyptian, the daughter of this land

I dislike America, we won't forget what they've done

They have nothing worth imitating. They're nothing but Americans.

They're useless as flies

But to all the rappers, I don't mean to demean you. I just want to clarify an idea that you misunderstand. As long as you are Egyptian, your style should be Egyptian.

I shouldn't imitate anyone

I can evolve into whatever I want and my name is Soska Girl.

And I'll wear my hijab and I won't put gel in my hair

In this song Soska defines what it means for her to be an Egyptian girl – she dresses in an Egyptian style by wearing hijab rather than styling her hair in another way; she loves Egypt and wants to make it a better country; she doesn't imitate or like Americans. Soska often wears neckties and buttoned collared shirts and recently does not wear a headscarf (as seen in recent

Instagram images). Myam and Soska's reference to the hijab, dress and appearance indicates their *awareness* and recognition of how clothing styles are read in Egypt and affect women's lives. Their lyrics do not indicate that *all* women who wear a headscarf have been forced to do so, but they acknowledge the pressures and complexities concerning women's presentation and identities. In their own lives the two artists have exhibited that while a woman may *choose* to wear the scarf, she also may choose not to.

As a response to social pressures which limit women's mobility and socialization, the artists rap about women taking actions to secure herself financially and to choose any field to work in. In her song "Oh, Woman" Malikah says"

Woman, I am talking to you as I am a woman like you

I am not exaggerating. It is time to confront and plan for you

Woman, voice the cry of freedom in the name of every woman who cried or suffered in the name of humanity

This is the message, follow it in details.

Man has decided that your life is destined for him to rule

Don't live in dismay, go work and earn money.

Come with me in this march. Love your sister and forget jealousy

In the song "A Free Woman" Amani confronts the limitations on women's abilities. Her lyrics speak directly to a second person singular male. In her verse, she reverses the judgements and accusations against women, placing them on the male, and creating an image of a strong, capable and independent woman.

You tell me that a woman can never become something big

A school teacher, that's all she can ever be

But you have surely forgotten
That women are essential beings that cannot be eliminated
Despite your constant tough oppression
You call her names such as “shame” & “reputation”
You try to make me forget that you are the perpetrator
A woman owns herself, she is not the property of anyone else
Exploitation, persecution and marginalization of women
From the violence she has endured, she has created a revolution
All the challenges she is facing are making her stronger
She can do whatever she wants, she does not need your permission

Finally, rather than being marginal members of the hip hop scenes, the artists’ songs describe how they can dominate within these spaces. The names which they have chosen or have been given support this. Malikah is the queen; Soultana (notice the English word “soul” in her name), is the ruler (*sultan* in Arabic indicates a ruler; *sultana* would be the feminine derivative of the word), and Shadia Masour is the First Lady of Arabic hip hop. The best example of this domination is the video of Shadia Mansour’s song “*Kuffiyyeh Arabiyya*” (“The Kuffiyyeh is Arab”).

The video opens with percussion beats and shots of a sunrise over a hillside with houses. In the shadows of an alleyway appears a silhouette of the rapper, Shadia Mansour, and a boy on a bicycle. Written in graffiti the English word, “Resistance” is on a concrete wall; a red and white square patterned scarf, a *kuffiyyeh*, flashes in front of the camera. Shadia addresses the camera directly, with American rapper M-1 standing in the background, “Good morning, cousins; y’all welcome, come in. What would you like us to serve you? Arab blood or tears from our eyes?”

(Free Arabs, 2017). She is wearing a Palestinian *thobe* or long sleeved black and red gown with cross-stitched and embroidered patterns down the front with a black and white *kuffiyeh* scarf draped over her right shoulder. She goes on, as the scene shifts to her rapping among several young men who are dancing around her, some mouthing the lyrics, “I think that's how they expected us to receive them. That's why they got embarrassed when they realized their mistake. That's why we rocked the *kuffiyeh*, the white and black. Now these dogs are startin' to wear it as a trend,” she says as she grabs the scarf draped around the neck of one of the young men to motion to it. “No matter how they design it, no matter how they change its color, the *kuffiyeh* is Arab, and it will stay Arab,” she says pointing down to the ground. Shadia speaks to the camera throughout, while M-1 nods in the background and young men encircle her dancing.

The themes of women’s liberation and agency arise throughout the artists’ songs and videos. In their music, the artists critique legal and social structures that put pressure on women to adopt a certain lifestyle that may be more to the desire of those around her than her own desire. The artists encourage women to meet this pressure with their own choices in appearance, socialization and other life choices.

4.3 AUDIENCE RECEPTION

Just as the artists’ music dealt with issues in their own lives, the audience discussions included perceptions of the music and reflections on the audience member’s life. Women from the region who had viewed the videos and listened to the songs reflected on their personal experiences with the issues. The audience included Khadija and Amina, two sisters from Egypt. Khadija recently completed her PhD in a science field and Amina is pursuing her PhD; Shams, a PhD student from Palestine who is also married and has three daughters; Maryam, a graduate student from Iran; Fatima, a student from Morocco who had recently completed a graduate

degree; Hind, a PhD student from Egypt; Rana, a PhD student of Palestinian descent; and Laila, another PhD student from Iran. The dominant themes were: *sexual harassment, social pressures and expectations*, and *preserving cultural heritage*.

The issues that arose in the discussion with sisters Khadiga and Amina were sexual harassment and patriotism. Harassment in the street and public spaces affects a woman's daily life and choices, they said, including where she decides to go and what she does during the day. Despite these challenges, it was evident in the interview that the sisters had a great love for their country. Within their interviews, they made a connection between women's bodies, men or other women's responses to their appearance, a lack of protection in the legal system against harassment, and women's daily choices, and behaviors. Laila, from Iran, mentioned how she used to carry small stones to throw at men who harassed her in the streets.

Similarly, Rana recalled her growing up years in Saudi Arabia and remembered an incident at a shopping mall when there was a woman fully covered in a black 'abaya or long gown, with her head covered with her two children and pushing a stroller. Despite her dress and the presence of children, she was still bothered by young men who threw slips of paper at her with their telephone numbers on them. "So, the harassment is unfortunately something that I think is my number one thing I remember growing up in Saudi Arabia, I mean just going to the mall and walking in the streets," she said (Personal interview, 2016). She drew similarity with a video she'd recently seen on YouTube of a young woman in New York City who filmed herself going about her day walking in parts of Manhattan to video how many times she was approached and called out to by men (Rob Bliss Creative, 2014).

...it kind of takes me back, you kind of want to make yourself smaller and not stand up as straight, a little bit uncomfortable, and I don't know if it's a confidence thing. I don't

know, always this uncomfortable feeling because you don't want to draw that attention to you because growing up [around] that type of attention solicited the harassment. And I'm sure my brother was taught differently, you know I don't think that's something he's ever done, but if you're in public without your hair covered, then you will be told something, and I'm talking about Saudi Arabia and this was back in the day, too, but you don't want to draw attention to yourself because it warrants that type of harassment. So it is something that kind of you, even until this day, you know, I want to smile and acknowledge strangers as I walk by, but you're not sure if that's going to bring on some unwanted attention (Personal interview, 2016).

Rana works at a university in the south providing technical support to faculty and is also pursuing a PhD. Even though, she still has these concerns about self-confidence. In this way, a woman's appearance can be something that holds her in bondage. She also commented about trends and interest on Instagram in postings about hijab fashion and make-up. Though Rana does not wear a scarf herself, she appreciated these efforts among women to be fashionable. She also mentioned that she had recalled U.S. singer Rihanna in Dubai who had made a fashion statement by wearing a hooded garment and mentioned seeing dresses with a hood on them or some other type of hair covering. In her life experiences, Rana has seen that covering for a woman does not necessarily prevent harassment. However, she appreciates the creativity women may exhibit in creating their own style.

During the discussions, the audience members also reflected on judgements, social pressures and expectations regarding a woman's sexuality, socialization and profession in life. Rana related to Yemeni rapper Amani's lyrics that mentioned shame and reputation. She said,

So, the artists talk about shame and they talk about reputation, which is something that ‘til this day is, “Oh, you want to keep your reputation clean”, and you know, like it’s pretty much like that’s all you have as a woman, you know, one bad mark on your reputation and people will know, and that’s your life, and that’s all you have and you have to keep pure (Personal interview, 2016).

Hind from Egypt also reflected on the various roles and social expectations placed on women.

And you’re supposed to be a good wife and an amazing mother, but you’re supposed to bring money into the household and you’re supposed to be this well-behaved, really shy and naïve thing, but at the same time, you know, move around and show them that you’re pretty, you know like you’re the prettiest girl on earth. And it’s like okay, we’re raised to be bipolar basically (laughing) (Personal interview, 2016).

There is a social stigma that the audience perceived and acknowledged for women who do not comply with the acceptable social standards. According to Fatima, from Morocco, a woman who does not follow the majority’s culture of socialization could be called “*bint a-siqa*” or “daughter of the street.” Maryam, from Iran, acknowledged the pressures on women to follow a prescribed life pattern that included college, marriage, and family.

So, for instance if you’re not going to college and if you’re not married, it’s a question. “So, what are you doing?” Even if you’re going to college, they ask you, “So, what do you want to do after that? Do you want to continue to graduate school?” No. “Ok, so you wanna marry?” No. “So what? So, what are you gonna do?” Oh my God, why is that even a question? Usually they don’t ask this type of questions to a man. They don’t ask, “Ok, so are you gonna marry?” You know, they don’t even ask them. Sometimes

it's so cool for a boy to say that I'm not gonna marry. But a girl can't say that! (Personal interview, 2016).

The final theme that of the audience's reception was preservation of cultural heritage. This theme appeared especially in the discussions on the video of Shadia Mansour. My two audience respondents for Shadia's video were Shams, who was born and lived most of her life in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, and Rana, whose parents are Palestinian but spent some of her childhood in Jordan. Shams primarily read Shadia's message as one of unity among Arabs. She sees the *kuffiyyeh* as a symbol of Arab heritage. She also liked that Shadia wears a traditional dress; even though she was not born there, Shadia remembers her Palestinian heritage. Shams could relate to this message. Even though she is living with her family outside of the Palestinian land, she is still proud of her Palestinian roots she says. The song also registered with Rana as a song of cultural pride. She remembered a few years ago when a friend posted on Facebook that the *kuffiyyeh* is not a trend or "a scarf that you wear with your outfits because it's cute"(Personal interview, 2016). The friend went on to post about the meaning and symbolism of the scarf. Rana also recalled attending a fundraiser dinner during Ramadan that was specifically for families in Gaza and many of the young women and girls wore *kuffiyyeh*-patterned clothes with cross-stich. She acknowledged that there is some commercialization of the style but that it still is symbolic and there is a message of Palestinian pride and solidarity when it is worn. Rana also perceived the participation of M-1 as a way to connect the Palestinian struggle to the rest of the world, especially since he is American. She also commented that since M-1 was presumably African American, then there is another connection with the meaning of Shadia's message: just as various aspects of black culture and traditions and art forms have become trends and styles that are far-removed from the lifestyle and experience of black people, so too has the *kuffiyyeh*.

She pointed out that appreciating a cultural symbol is one thing and acknowledging and respecting its origins is another.

Shadia Mansour embodies Palestinian femininity in her performances by wearing the *thobe* while rapping and singing about the struggles of the Palestinian people. The song *Kufiyyeh Arabiyya* is a direct reference to a patterned material that's been worn as an article of clothing and representative of Arab solidarity for decades. For an Israeli designer to adopt the cloth and market it to her symbolizes yet another material cultural object that is taken away. These sentiments of cultural pride were understood by the audience respondents who appreciated Shadia wearing the *thobe* to mark her as Palestinian in contrast to the American rapper. The respondent also drew on seeing the *kufiyyeh* at a fundraising event so it is familiar to the diaspora. The participation of M-1 in the video may serve to broaden the audience and make connections with American hip hop that has been commodified.

4.4 CONCLUSION

The MENA women rappers' music and online representations contribute to a new configuration concerning knowledge about women in the MENA region – one that places their voices at the center. Centralizing women's voices addresses Spivak's (1985) notion of “worlding” for which hegemonic accounts have defined how we understand the MENA region and women in this part of the world (p. 243). These artists contribute to a sense of “anti-worlding” by breaking down and East-West binary. They communicate the desire for equality in society without rejecting their personal backgrounds. Wanting the right to choose what to wear or to whom to speak or marry, or to file a sexual harassment case does not mean that one wants to become a part of a hegemonic system that has been upheld by the West. Rather their music

indicates a plurality of identities: to be Muslim/Christian/Arab/Iranian *and* a socially conscious rapper.

Through the artists' discussions of themes around legal and social codes, expected, acceptable and revered roles of women in society, and relationships with men and sexuality, they display differential oppositional consciousness. The work of the artists calls attention to the lack of state support to protect women against street harassment and domestic abuse and celebrates women's agency and persistence within these flawed systems. The headscarf, for instance, when forced, can be interpreted as a material of oppression. On the other hand, the scarf may also be chosen as an identity marker. The audience reception among eight women with backgrounds in the region also revealed their perspectives about their personal experiences with sexual harassment and socialization restrictions, career aspirations and hopes and uplifting cultural heritage. The music and audience reflections represent the complexities and continual negotiation of individual identity vis-à-vis social and cultural structures that women navigate daily. In the following chapter I take a closer look at the solidarity artists forge within local, national and international spaces.

CHAPTER 5: MENA HIP HOP FEMINISM: TOWARDS A TRANSNATIONAL GIRLHOOD/WOMANHOOD PERSPECTIVE

Post-2011 marks a new era in the Middle East and North Africa. While women were active organizers and participants in the social and political uprisings known as the Arab Spring, the media representations of women's experiences and desires remain lacking. The image of a veiled woman holding an Arabic or English protest sign or of a woman without a headscarf holding a similar sign is prevalent in online stock images in a search for "Arab Spring women." These images can be taken to portray an updated version of what has been called the "woman question" of the Middle East (Pollard, 2013, p. 346), or they can be interpreted as individuals exercising a collective agency. In this new era, an understanding about the shifting, elevated or stifled positions of women in the region needs to be brought to the forefront and done so within the words and voices of women themselves. Too often the curriculum of Middle East studies programs and courses fail to include any recognition of women as cultural actors, producers and consumers, or question how women may be representing themselves within popular culture spaces. This disparity of knowledge effects not only a whole field of area studies, but fuels and continues an Orientalist notion that this region is unchanging and that women lack agency in their lives. The purpose of this dissertation has been to insist otherwise.

While women continue to face unfair treatment, violence, physical and psychological abuse, there is an artistic and creative response and opposition to these daily realities, and this opposition is being read and understood by other women from the region as well. The artists from Morocco (Soultana), Egypt (Soska and Myam Mahmoud), Lebanon (Malikah), Palestine (Shadia Mansour), Yemen (Amani) and Iran (Justina) each come from unique contexts and backgrounds, but their music shares a common thread of representing a woman-centered

perspective that operates within their cultures, at times utilizing and affirming gendered norms of dress and lifestyle choices and at times pushing back and resisting those norms, asserting a desire for women's liberation and greater agency. I have argued that a women's-centered perspective entails recognition of and resistance to gendered social norms concerning women's lives and life choices, including motherhood, marriage and relationships with men, and choices regarding work.

In this chapter I consider the possibility of extending hip hop feminism (Morgan, 1999; Pough, 2004) that builds on the critical insights made so strikingly available in the creative production of MENA women hip hop artists' work. I offer in what follows a theoretical and practical intervention in hip hop studies and education practices that has valued Black and Brown girls' expression and knowledge production (Brown, 2013). I want to insist on the safety and well-being of marginalized Black and Brown bodies, including women and LGBTQ communities, and to extend this approach globally to include non-U.S. based hip-hop producers and consumers, specifically women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. To do this I will first describe the different streams of awareness or consciousness that are displayed in the artists' music – one a nationalistic consciousness and another that is more connected to international networks and another that is transnational. In considering the lives and experiences of the artists from the MENA region as expressed through hip hop culture, I suggest how a critical listening of these voices within fields of education can help to normalize, or de-Orientalize, the region.

5.1 (W)RAPS OF DIFFERENTIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The music and representations of the seven artists from the MENA region contain messages that call for the protection of and respect for women's bodies and the realization of

women's rights for agency in their own lives. While their individual biographies, styles, self-representations, performance venues and social networks vary, each one expresses an oppositional consciousness to a dominant, male social order. Sandoval's theory of *differential oppositional consciousness* of U.S. third world feminism is useful to think about the different approaches the artists are taking towards women's rights in their music and the different experiences that their music has afforded them.

U.S. third world feminists represent the varied internally colonized communities of the U.S. whose voices have been left out of mainstream, hegemonic feminism. Sandoval has explained that a "common culture" among feminists of color was recognized in the 1970s. This culture was comprised of the "skills, values, and ethics generated by subordinated citizenry" and allowed feminists of color to "recognize one another as countrywomen – and men – of the same psychic terrain" (p. 10). The common culture that the artists I've profiled have recognized and identified with is hip hop culture. Though they are not from the U.S., they have taken up this art form, and have adapted to some form of U.S. third world feminism. However, just as U.S. hegemonic feminism has been criticized for not successfully dealing with racism in feminist theory and practice, U.S. third world feminism has not adequately treated other forms of oppression and discrimination related to religion, such as Islamophobia, in the U.S. It is at this theoretical intersection of third world feminism, postcolonial aesthetics and religious, social, cultural and ethnic identity that MENA women rappers exist. Similar to what has been described of black women during the Black Freedom era, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s (Ford, 2015), the MENA artists' raps as well as their "wraps", or styles of dress and self-representation, display a differential oppositional consciousness. Artists are performing within and outside of their countries and are also disseminating their music online. Some access local and in-country

resources and are contributing to rap becoming a national art form. Others have access to resources available through international organizations and travel. They use hip hop as a platform to bring attention to the infringement on women's rights and lives within their home countries.

5.1.1 Participating in rap as a national art form

Although it's been well documented that rap has existed in the Palestinian territories, Egypt, and Iran, the music of Shadia Mansour, Soska, and Justina continues to strengthen rap as a national art form in these areas. In their lyrics, clothing styles, and commentary they've made about their music in interviews, each of the artists have displayed that they are acknowledging and grappling with how to be regarded as national artists within their home countries. An oppositional consciousness – as Sandoval has pointed out – is an awareness of subject-citizens to use the knowledge they possess to “break with ideology” while at the same time working within ideology (1991, p. 2). The artists assert their national and local identities through their choices in clothing, images and scenes in their videos and colloquial language use. As national emcees, the artists' own bodies are sites of opposition.

In their songs and videos, these artists display and affirm women's clothing styles that are customary within the region, while at the same time asserting that women should have equal rights to be respected as an individual and artist, despite what she chooses to wear. In doing so, they validate the article of clothing as an article central to national identity while opposing social norms that allow for the judgement of women's behavior. Since hip hop in this case is being used as a vehicle to affirm national dress and identity, then it acts as a national art. Shadia Mansour's music and self-presentation indexes or points to Palestinian identity; the symbolic *kuffiyeh*, and Palestinian *thobe* that she wears nationalize her art form. Even when she performs

outside of Palestine and the Middle East region, such as in the U.S. or U.K., Mansour wears the traditional Palestinian dress. She proclaims in her song “*Kuffiyeh Arabeyyeh*”:

That's why I rock the Palestinian gear. From Haifa, Jenin, Jabal al-Nar to Ramallah....

Listen, I'm Shadia Mansour, and the gear I'm rockin' is my identity.

Since the day I was born, raisin' people's awareness been my responsibility (Free Arabs, 2017).

Besides a facial shot of another woman with brown hair pulled back and background shots of two women wearing scarves and long black ‘*abayas*, or dresses, walking away, Mansour appears to be the only woman in the video. She is at times surrounded by a group of young men who circle her with a raised arm, lowering in pulsing movements to the music. In the video of another song, “*Lazm Netghayyar*” (“We Have to Change”) with Syrian-American rapper Omar Offendum, Shadia’s lyrics take a more personal, oppositional stance:

Whoever wants to stop me, he/she instead encourages me to do the opposite.

I’m a sister of men but I have a right.

How can I say about myself that I fight for freedom if I stay away from challenges and fear the word “no”? (Translation)

Throughout the video, she holds up or pulls across the screen various images of women who are supposedly portrayed as being Palestinian. There’s a newspaper clipping from a U.S. newspaper from 1978 with a caption describing that an American mayor extends a handshake to an Israeli girl dressed in Palestinian national costume at a national folk festival. The use of the image in the video is again a rejection of the misappropriation and disregard for Palestinian culture and heritage. Mansour’s actions in the video and her verse speak of the Palestinian woman’s double burden: a struggle for the liberation of the Palestinian people and a fight for equal rights. She

claims her allegiance by affirming that she is a sister, but also asserts that she herself has individual rights as well. Within this verse, there is a sense of a personal struggle and her own resistance. The video of “*Kuffiyeh Arabiyya*” puts her in the subject position as men encircle her. She affirms her Palestinian identity by wearing the Palestinian dress and criticizing the misappropriation of the garments. At the same time, she acknowledges a personal struggle and resistance, calling for Palestinian self-determination and fighting for her own agency as an artist.

The headscarf, or hijab, is the garment of national reference in the song by Egyptian artist Soska, “*Bint Masriyya*” (“Egyptian Girl”). She raps:

I don’t have to wear American clothes in order to stand out...

I can evolve into whatever I want, and my name is Soska Girl.

And I’ll wear my hijab (head covering) and I won’t put gel in my hair

I want to present an art, not just be cool (Translation)

Soska refers to her own appearance as a testament that she is a national artist. Her headscarf and rejection of “American clothes” authenticate her as being Egyptian. To validate her identity as a national artist, Soska points to her body and self-representation. Furthermore, she states that her form or style may change. She is not a static, defined object, but she has the possibility to evolve and change. In fact, Soska no longer appears in public wearing a headscarf. Her lyrics here affirm a woman’s choice in dress and self-representation.

The headscarf and covering clothes are also worn by Iranian rapper Justina in all her videos, although she appears on an online talk show interview without the scarf. By keeping her head covered and wearing covering clothing, such as a long coat or shirt in her videos, Justina is making an effort to fit in with the dress code norms within the society. However, she gives a message that critiques this forced dress code on girls in the video for “*Kash Donya Behem Ye*

Dokhtar Bede” (“I Wish the World Gave Me a Daughter”) as described in Chapter Three. The video shows a girl’s dismay on her ninth birthday as she opens a box with a scarf inside and drapes the scarf over her head. Although Justina keeps her head covered throughout the video, the video portrays the young girl wearing the scarf against her will. Justina’s music is a national art in that it operates within a national system that has prescribed what is acceptable in terms of women’s appearances and behavior. The video also portrays gender separation, as a girl’s and boy’s hands are prevented from touching. The image of a young woman with a black eye in the video and the message on a woman’s hand at the close of the video that reads, “Stop violence against women” implies that the control of girls’ and women’s behavior is related to domestic abuse and violence against women. Throughout her music, Justina deals with the sentiments of restriction and control. Yet she still lives in the society. To her, rap is an art form in which the artist speaks about his or her own experiences, rather than imitate another’s. Her participation as a rapper continues to nationalize rap in Iran as she provides a woman-centered perspective.

Within their music, Shadia Mansour, Soska and Justina adopt an oppositional consciousness that makes use of national identity – or the liberation and self-determination of a people group, in the case of Palestine. They literally *put on* their nationalism and refer to the garments in their songs and videos. At the same time, their videos and music portray a resistance to forced norms of dress and restrictive monitoring of women’s dress and behavior. Their music affirms a dynamic, evolving national identity – a society can change its ways, a woman can change her style of dress. In Justina’s video, it is suggested that forcing a girl or woman to present herself in a certain way is connected to physical violence against women. Even though the artists may display or affirm a style of dress that is gendered or expected of women, their lyrics and videos affirm women’s agency in choosing how she presents herself. The artists

possess multiple oppositional consciousnesses as they acknowledge their own choice of clothing and also acknowledge personal struggle. Their music and clothing styles suggest that just because an artist wears a hijab and a traditional dress does not make her complicit to women's mistreatment. Her style does however locate her within a national sentiment which serves to authenticate her music as a national art form.

5.1.2 Hip hop feminism and development

Other artists, however, make use of regional and international networks to perform, disseminate their music and collaborate. When these artists are abroad and traveling, they are rappers or emcees *from* their home country. Rather than being identified as a Lebanese rapper, for example, Malikah is a rapper *from* Lebanon (see Dhillon, 2014, p. 165) . Malikah (Lebanon), Soultana (Morocco), Myam Mahmoud (Egypt) and Amani (Yemen) have all been involved with regional talent competitions on satellite networks, such as *Arabs Got Talent*, international development organizations, such as Oxfam, and foreign universities, institutions, or performing arts centers, such as the Lincoln Center. These connections have expanded the artists' audiences beyond their home countries. Online sharing platforms such as YouTube archive these occurrences and make the artists' international connections visible to a wider, most often English-speaking, audience. Each of the artists have had international appearances or experiences that are linked to humanitarian efforts and aid to war-torn countries (such as Malikah collaborating and performing with the Orchestra of Syrian Musicians in Amsterdam), awareness-building concerning women in the MENA region (Myam Mahmoud and Amani's participation in the Oxfam International Women's Day rap and video recording at a refugee camp in Jordan), state diplomacy (Soultana's participation in the U.S. State Department's International Visitor

Leadership Program and artist residency), and privatized performing arts forums (Amani's participation in the Lincoln Center Global Exchange conference).

This international exposure has the potential to create a certain kind of narrative as the artists may be regarded as an isolated exception, a young woman who has “made it out”, conquered the odds, and become a rapper. What is truer, is to consider the artists as part of an ever-growing population of MENA youth who are connected globally, both by social networks and global communications and shared culture. What is gained in the international interactions is an extended, often U.S.-based audience which is made aware of situations in regions that are far too often ignored and unrecognized. The fact that young women are bringing about this recognition to a world that considers them as silent objects is itself revolutionary.

5.1.3 Black Lives Matter: Transnational movements, representation and existence

In addition to national oppositional consciousness, and international oppositional consciousness, *transnational* oppositional consciousness is expressed in the music and experiences of several of the artists. These artists connect to the origins of rap music in the U.S. and believe the music to represent resistance to social and economic oppression and a means to communicate a message. The artists appear to represent a connectedness with the ongoing racialized struggles in the U.S., specifically the police shootings of the summer of 2016.

Following the shooting and death of Philando Castile in Minnesota on July 6, 2016, Malikah reposted on Instagram a message from another user, stating, “It’s generally understood that police exist to keep order. What’s not understood is that order is white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (Malikah 961, 2016). She also shared a NY Daily News article about the arrest and testimony of Castile’s fiancé, Diamond Reynolds. Reynolds was in the car with her 4-year old daughter at the time Castile, who was in the driver’s seat, was shot and killed while Reynold’s

was arrested. Malikah tweeted, “This is heartbreaking. #blacklivesmatter #arablivesmatter #alllivesmatter We need a change!” (Malikah 961, 2016). Myam, from Egypt, tweeted a link to a Facebook post by another user that was an image of what appears to be a drawing of a woman holding a hanging letters sign that says “Black Lives Matter.” Behind her are several people, including a lighter-skinned woman holding her fist up, a man holding a baby, and an older woman wearing a headscarf. The image is below:

Image 12: Black Lives Matter Drawing



“Black Lives Matter” as a slogan, hashtag, and organization has been recognized globally as a movement that brings to the forefront the disproportionate amount of killing of Black people in the U.S. However, the organization, founded by three (presumably) queer women – Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrice Cullors - in the aftermath of the 2012 acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder trial of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, asserts that the movement is not just about extrajudicial killings of Black people. According to its website, it is:

an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression
(blacklivesmatter.com)

After an explanation of the history of the movement in a section of the site titled “Herstory”, Alicia Garza writes about the misappropriation of the slogan. Under the title “The Theft of Black Queer Women’s Work”, she describes how various ad campaigns and other activist groups have attempted to co-opt “Black Lives Matter” as a slogan – “all lives matter, brown lives matter, migrant lives matter, women’s lives matter”, et cetera, have all been adaptations. By not giving credit to the originators of the movement and their call for the recognition of basic human rights and dignity for Black people, so-called allies are contributing to systemic racism that erases the contributions of Black people to the struggle for human rights. Dropping “Black” from the slogan creates a failure to recognize the context from which the slogan originated. Garcia warns against “homogenizing very different experiences” and charges allies to “lift up Black lives as an opportunity to connect struggles across race, class, gender, nationality, sexuality and disability” (Garza, 2017). “Black lives matter” as a slogan is a decidedly positioned stance, one that requires learning about anti-Black racism and examining the ways in which others participate in it and benefit from it. How would Malikah’s and Myam’s social media activity regarding the death of Philando Castile in July, 2016, be interpreted by scholars, activists and other creative producers?

Violence committed against Black bodies is an on-going concern within hip-hop feminist studies. In her article, “Let Me Blow Your Mind: Hip Hop Feminist Futures in Theory and Praxis”, Treva Lindsey looks at the various positions taken within studies of hip-hop feminism to address teaching about social justice (2015). Lindsey expounds on how in the media, violence against the bodies of Black gender-conforming, or cisgender, men and boys has been treated differently than violence done against girls, women, transgender and non-gender-conforming individuals. Both hip hop feminism and Black Lives Matter aim to bring these marginalized

bodies to the center. What has not yet been fully explored is the intersection of race, religion, gender and sexuality. How are Lindsey's claims regarding Black violability – violence done to Black bodies – relevant to Black Muslims, for example? This question is especially timely in the U.S., where the so-called Muslim travel ban that was enacted shortly after Trump took the Presidential office. Executive Order No. 13,760, signed and enacted on January 27, 2017, barred entry to the U.S. for visa holders from seven majority-Muslim countries: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Protests and demonstrations erupted at major U.S. airports against the order, which affected travelers returning from those countries. A Stanford University Ph.D. student, Nisrin Elamin from Sudan, spoke about her experience being detained at JFK airport on *Democracy Now!* She said:

...you know, I guess the point that I actually want to make is, you know, I think this order is a reflection of a larger trend in this country to criminalize black people, to criminalize immigrants, to criminalize Muslims. And as a black Muslim immigrant, I'm really concerned about that. And I do think that the Somalis and Sudanese, people of African descent who are going to be affected by this, you know, I think they're going to be treated differently, frankly (democracynow.org).

Hip hop feminism can speak to Muslim violability and Black Muslim violability. Mosques have been vandalized and damaged in the U.S. and women who wear headscarves have been harassed and assaulted in public. Looking at the music, lives and lived experiences of women who rap from the MENA, predominantly-Muslim, region, validates these experiences by making them known to wider audiences. Their work adheres to the popular Palestinian resistance slogan, that, "existence is resistance." The artists create a soundtrack to this existence.

The differential oppositional consciousness that the artists exhibit – national, international, and transnational – are not without their own problems and complexities. The national consciousness of Shadia Mansour and Soska affirm national pride and identity while at the same time express the possibility for change in one's own personal circumstances or appearance. In the case of Soska, it is not only the affirmation of Egyptian identity, but the downgrading of American identity, as one of my interviewees observed, that is so blatant. She does not want to dress like an American or be compared to U.S. rapper 50 Cent, but to be regarded as an authentic Egyptian rapper. Justina conforms to the prescribed dress code for women in Iran in her videos, yet features in those same videos portrayals of girls and women having their behavior restricted and being abused. Malikah, Soultana, Myam Mahmoud, and Amani have all been benefactors of international corporations (such as Google, as Malikah performed with the Orchestra of Syrian Musicians in Amsterdam at an event sponsored by Google), non-profit humanitarian organizations and state governments that have hosted them or sponsored their work in some way. It has yet to be explored whether this contact with these groups has influenced their music or art in any way. Finally, Myam Mahmoud's and Malikah's mentioning of Black Lives Matter as a slogan and hashtag open a connection for transnational movements and expressions of marginalized people that both Black Lives Matter the organization and hip hop feminism espouse to. It remains questionable as to whether Malikah's use of #alllivesmatter and #arablivesmatter along with #blacklivesmatter contributes to the erasure of the original work of the founders of the movement, or whether it creates inclusivity of a new (Arab) hip hop feminist actor. Hip hop feminism as a field of inquiry does not stop at its theoretical interventions, however. Studies have focused on how a greater understanding of women and girls' participation in hip hop practices have shaped how they view themselves and

other women (Durham, 2013). The work of Ruth Nicole Brown (2009 and 2013) has been critical in creating spaces of freedom and expression for Black girls in educational settings. In the final section I turn to how the music of the MENA women rappers which I've discussed in this dissertation can enrich the field of Middle East studies and create spaces to discuss issues affecting Muslim-majority MENA women within the region and diaspora.

5.2 POPULAR CULTURE AND PEDAGOGY IN MENA STUDIES

Hip hop feminist scholarship has addressed issues affecting marginalized youth, specifically Black girls, and how education practices can include these young people's voices, knowledge and value (Brown, 2013 and Lindsey, 2015). A hip hop feminist perspective with a MENA focus, then, may address how girls and women appearing to be or self-identifying from the region or self-identifying as Muslim relate to the issues articulated by the MENA women rappers. These issues include: the lack of policies to protect women's bodies and rights, legal and social codes that regulate women's appearance, mobility and behavior in relationship with men, and the family functioning as a system of support and pressure for girls and women. Hearing how the women who are artists treat these issues in their music, interviews and online representations, and how other women receive these messages allows for the humanization of MENA girls and women. Examining the MENA women rappers helps to not only understand artists who are "over there" but also communities in the U.S., as well.

Below, I suggest the benefits of incorporating the music of the MENA artists within various levels and types of education. Written curriculum that is presented to students should include an online component that includes links to songs, videos and other online archival content such as interviews and journalistic articles. In this way, students achieve learning and develop reading comprehension, listening and interpretation skills. Jace Clayton's (2016)

Uproot: Travels in 21st Century Music and Digital Culture, a book of reflections of the author/DJ's travel and music-making, includes a website with samples of the music mentioned in his text. Text, audio and visual material create holistic learning experiences for readers and students. Students may be asked about what they find in the music and visual representations that relates to them, and what they find to be a new concept. In this way students may recognize their own positionality with regards to the music and may develop an understanding of a new perspective. For instance, the work of the MENA artists may be a lens through which Muslim girls discuss their own experiences with girlhood and ideas about womanhood.

5.2.1 Muslim girls' education

As sentiments of fear and discord are on the rise in the U.S., communities and groups that support marginalized people are also increasing their work and efforts. Islamic education programs for school-aged children and youth continue to be an interest for many Muslim families in the U.S. These educational programs may be after-school, weekend, or homeschool cooperatives. It is in these spaces where Muslim girls may be able to discuss the representations of women in popular culture and how MENA women rappers may be disrupting these representations. Such programs would be drawing on the participatory studies of Black girlhood freedom and creativity initiated by Ruth Nicole Brown and discussed in her book *Hear Our Truths: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood*. In her work with SOLHOT (Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths), Brown suggests that “creative work produces knowledge that Black girls are accountable to and relationships that hold them accountable” (p. 4). The SOLHOT sessions are structured around the participants' knowledge: each session began with a Black girl's game, sharing something of educational value, creating something together (such as a theatrical piece), and each girl remembering someone together. Looking at the music of the

MENA artists can create emancipatory and participatory spaces for girls within Muslim education spaces. Popular culture created by women could also be incorporated more in Middle East studies curricula in within higher education and teacher education.

5.2.2 Teacher education

The population of Muslim students in schools in the U.S. is expected to continue to rise as the Muslim population continues to increase. The Pew Research Center estimated that there were about 3.3 million Muslims living in the U.S. in 2015, making up 1% of the total population, and this is expected to double by 2050 (Mohamed, 2016). Anti-Muslim sentiments also continue to rise. The FBI hate crime report of 2015 showed that anti-Muslim hate crimes in the U.S. rose 67%, from 154 incidents in 2014 to 257 in 2015 (Ansari, 2016). As this type of aggression increases, educators will need to be more prepared to deal with the possible marginalization of Muslim students in the classroom. Narratives by sixth-grade students in the Boston area revealed that Muslim youth must contend with perceptions of Muslims as terrorist, fanatical, suspicious, backward, insular, anti-Western, anti-democratic, and Muslim women as oppressed, submissive, powerless, abused and uneducated (Abo-Zena, et al. 2009, p. 21). The students challenged these stereotypes by sharing their own narratives. The music produced by MENA women artists could be included in teacher education programs and be a segue to connect the lives of girls and women in the region to those in the U.S. I recently shared some of the music with a small group of pre-service teachers in a social studies education class and they were grateful to have some popular culture content to share with their future students.

5.2.3 Higher education

Finally, Middle East studies curricula in higher education in the U.S. largely focus on historical, religious and political issues in the region without taking in to consideration modern-

day aesthetics and popular culture. Rarely are courses taught on popular culture. Teaching on popular culture would disrupt the discourse of orientalism in which Western scholars speak for and define the region, and normalize the experiences of the women who are artists. Only when women's and girls' voices are heard themselves within the studies can scholarship be useful in informing policies directed toward the betterment of the lives of women and girls.

5.3 CONCLUSION

At the intersection of postcolonial aesthetics, U.S. third world feminist studies and hip hop feminist studies, I have aimed to examine the diverse lived experiences of girls and women in the Middle East and North Africa region, particularly Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Palestine, Morocco and Yemen, through the artistic work they create. The female rappers are “involved in the global manifestations of the hip hop cultural movement” while resisting “forms of oppression in global societies” (Alim, p. 296). Representations of girlhood and womanhood are received and interpreted by women from these countries residing in a Midwestern university town in the U.S. through interviews and discussions as the women reflect on what the messages from the artists mean to their own lives. An analysis of popular culture texts including online songs, videos, lyrics, commentary and media coverage created by and dedicated to MENA women in hip hop combined with women's real life experiences make more accessible women's voices from the region. Rappers draw on differential and oppositional consciousnesses in their personal and professional networks to imagine a better future for women in their societies. Just as Lindsey (2015) argues for hip hop feminism as a theory and praxis for urban education, so too can we begin to apply it to other regions of the world to continue to develop more varied, emancipatory epistemologies and perspectives on girlhood and womanhood.

In this dissertation, I've addressed the dearth of representational work on MENA women's lives that is available within media, popular culture and academia by focusing on the work of seven female rappers from the MENA region: Shadia Mansour (Palestine), Malikah (Lebanon), Soutlana (Morocco), Soska (Egypt), Myam Mahmoud (Egypt), Amani (Yemen), and Justina (Iran). I have positioned these rappers as artists embodying a hip hop aesthetic to draw on oppositional stances and emancipatory possibilities that were central to early hip hop in the U.S. and have aligned their oppositional stances to U.S. third world feminism. Through these theoretical lenses and my methodology of discourse ethnography, I've responded to Orientalist approaches that speak for and about the region without engaging voices from the region, and to upset knowledge systems about the region that are based on ulterior political motives and interests.

My methodology, discourse ethnography, has included reading online texts and lived experiences to see how the artists are using hip hop culture and fashioning it to fit their needs in their home societies; to explore the issues that the artists take up in their lyrics and videos; and to observe audience responses. The online domain has been the site for production, dissemination and reception in this case. The artists' music and videos and online media coverage have achieved global recognition. I purposefully selected eight audience members with transnational experiences to interview about the music and its relevance to their lives. To account for individualities, I described the audience members' variation in personal backgrounds. The explanations of these variations are meant to reinforce that not all MENA women receive the messages the same and that my purposeful sample does not represent all women.

Likewise, through the artist profiles, I describe each of the rappers' individual backgrounds and perspectives, including the influence and support of their family. I also look at

the unique paths each has taken to begin performing and receiving recognition. This often happened through competitions – festivals or televised competition shows – or locally within the country and was taken up by international media. The artists’ lives and work contribute to “anti-worlding”, dismantling an East-West binary, as they sample music and cite inspirational influence from U.S. artists and collaborate with artists in the region and abroad. Through their online presence, their work moves across borders virtually even if they themselves do not physically. It is within the online spaces through their work that the artists create emancipatory spaces for themselves and other women.

What I’m calling the artists’ (w)rap⁶ of consciousness include the awareness they have about how they represent national, international and transnational sentiments within and on their bodies. The artists refer to their own clothing style – whether it is headscarf, *thobe*, *kuffiyyeh* – to position themselves as authentic, localized artists. They display an awareness of the meaning and value that their skills have abroad and find opportunities to become representatives of global artists *from* their home countries. Finally, they display an awareness of the racialized violence and perceived devaluing of black lives in the U.S. in recent years. I have argued that these various forms of awareness are revealed in their self-representations as well as in their music and artistic personas that they have created.

At last, I return full circle to the problem that has motivated my study – knowledge production and the representation of the women of this so-called region – with a purpose to increase the accessibility of women’s voices from the region within higher education and school systems. Placing women’s creative voices at the center and giving spaces for critique by other women will allow us to get closer to acknowledging these artists as cultural actors and the

⁶ I attribute this play on words to Mona Haydar, a Syrian-American artist from Flint Michigan, in her song “Hijabi (Wrap my Hijab)”. Since she is a U.S.-based artist rapping predominantly in English, I did not include her in my study. However, her song and video is a striking example of Muslim pride and feminist messages.

various systems of knowledge belonging to Muslim women in this country and around the world. Now, as a producer of knowledge, I hope to hear the voices of reflection from Muslim women and those who identify with the region on what I have written in this dissertation. Despite the recent political rhetoric in the U.S., which has failed to acknowledge Islamophobic crimes and has cast a shadow on the contributions Muslim Americans have made to this country, there will be Muslim children in classrooms across the country in need of the acceptance and understanding that all children need. It's my hope that eventually more elements and activities of popular culture produced by women will make it in to Middle East studies curriculum to shape future scholarship and understanding. These expressions represent what is most common and human in each of us.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Audience Questions

1. What ideas or issues does this song represent to you?
2. Do you think that women in the Middle East or Muslim societies have to deal with the issues of.....(depending on what the song mentions – ie. harassment, body/character image, self-determination..)
3. Does this song/video remind you of anything else you've ever seen?
4. Is there anything that connects to you personally about this song that you would like to share?
5. Do you feel that music like this or other art may have a potential for impacting societies and affecting a positive change for women? How so?

Questions for Artists

1. Can you tell me about your experience with poetry, rap and hip hop culture? What motivated you to create this type of music? Where have you performed?
2. What are the main issues and messages that you want your music to address?
3. How has your music been received by those within your country? Outside of your country?
4. What are some barriers you've had to deal with in creating your music? What support have you been given?
5. Do you feel there is a social or personal risk for you in creating this music?
6. What are your personal aspirations for creating this kind of music?
7. In what way does your music represent women's experiences in (country)?
8. How have women responded to your music?
9. Have you collaborated with other artists and how has this collaboration affected your music and messages?
10. Do you intend to continue to create this music and are there ways girls and young women are being encouraged to rap in (country)?

APPENDIX B: IRB LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
528 East Green Street
Suite 203
Champaign, IL 61820



February 9, 2016

Cameron McCarthy
Ed Organization and Leadership
360 Education Bldg
1310 S Sixth St

RE: *Soundtracks of Existence: Representations of Women's Rights in Hip Hop in the Middle East and North Africa*
IRB Protocol Number: 16480

Dear Dr. McCarthy:

Thank you for submitting the completed IRB application form for your project entitled *Soundtracks of Existence: Representations of Women's Rights in Hip Hop in the Middle East and North Africa*. Your project was assigned Institutional Review Board (IRB) Protocol Number 16480 and reviewed. It has been determined that the research activities described in this application meet the criteria for exemption at 45CFR46.101(b)(2).

This determination of exemption only applies to the research study as submitted. Please note that additional modifications to your project need to be submitted to the IRB for review and exemption determination or approval before the modifications are initiated.

Copies of the attached, date-stamped consent form(s) are to be used when obtaining informed consent. If there is a need to revise or alter the consent form(s), please submit the revised form(s) for IRB review, approval, and date-stamping prior to use.

Exempt protocols will be closed and archived five years from the date of approval. Researchers will be required to contact our office if the study will continue beyond five years. If an amendment is submitted once the study has been archived, researchers will need to submit a new application and obtain approval prior to implementing the change.

We appreciate your conscientious adherence to the requirements of human subjects research. If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me at OPRS, or visit our website at <http://oprs.research.illinois.edu>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Rebecca Van Tine'.

Rebecca Van Tine, MS
Human Subjects Research Specialist, Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

Attachment(s)

c: Angela Williams



University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Consent Form

Title: *Soundtracks of Existence: Representations of Women's Rights in Hip Hop in the Middle East and North Africa*

You are invited to participate in a research project that is overseen by Dr. Cameron McCarthy from the College of Education, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and conducted by Angela Williams. The project hopes to gain more information about women's lives and experiences in the Middle East and North Africa as expressed through rap music and hip hop culture. We are requesting your participation in a 30-60 minute interview. During this interview you'll be asked to answer questions about your experiences as an artist and how your music relates to women's lives today.

I understand that my participation is voluntary. There is no anticipated risk in this research beyond that of everyday life and although I may not benefit directly it is hoped that the results of the research will increase the understanding about women and their social conditions in the Middle East and North Africa

and

I understand that I can request that any data that the researcher extracts from the interview for use in reports or published findings will not under any circumstances contain names or identifying characteristics. I can request to have a pseudonym and for my identity to be kept private.

and

I understand that any information I provide is confidential,

I also

understand that data from the interview will be kept in a secure file electronically. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 10-year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

and

I understand that I may view the interview transcript if I want to

I agree to have my real identity as an artist revealed. (please check a box)

Yes ☐ No ☐

Will my study-related information be kept confidential?

Yes, but not always. In general, we will not tell anyone any information about you. When this research is discussed or published, no one will know that you were in the study. However, laws and university rules might require us to disclose information about you. For example, if required by laws or University Policy, study information which identifies you and the consent form signed by you may be seen or copied by the following people or groups:

- The university committee and office that reviews and approves research studies, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Office for Protection of Research Subjects;
- University and state auditors, and Departments of the university responsible for oversight of research

Questions should be directed to Dr. Cameron McCarthy at cmccart1@illinois.edu; or 217-244-4953 or Angela Williams at aswillms@illinois.edu. Questions about my rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

I agree to take part this interview. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that:

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher

☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped and/or video-taped

☐ Yes ☐ No

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Institutional Review Board

Approved: Feb-9-2016
IRB #: 16480

Participant's name _____

Signature _____

Date _____



University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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